

ANTIOCH *the* REVIEW



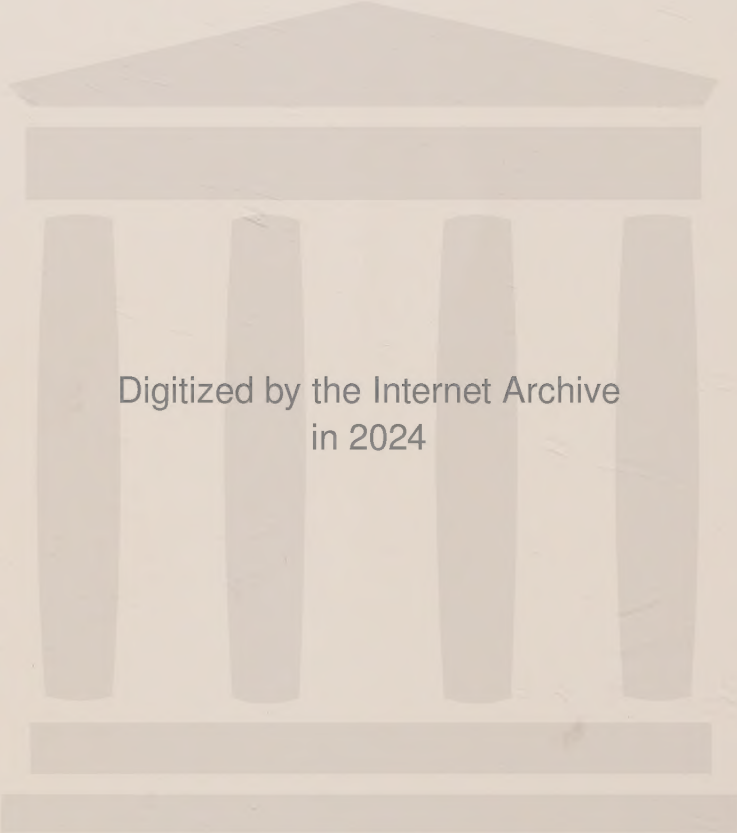
50th Anniversary Issue

Daniel Bell
T. Coraghessan Boyle
Jorge Luis Borges
Raymond Carver
William Dickey
Robert Creeley
Ralph Ellison
Annie Dillard

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese
Andrew Greeley
Clifford Geertz
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Cynthia Ozick
Sylvia Plath
David Riesman
Anne Sexton
William Trevor
Mark Strand
Richard Wilbur
Joy Williams





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ANTIOCH
the REVIEW

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An independent quarterly journal associated with Antioch College and published at Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387. Second-class postage paid at Yellow Springs, Ohio. Send change of address notices, undeliverable copies, etc., to Yellow Springs, Ohio.

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Subscriptions: \$25.00 per year (four numbers); institutions, \$36.00; foreign \$44.00; sample copies, \$5.50. Subscriptions: P.O. Box 626, Dayton, OH 45459-0626. U.S.A. newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc. 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, Ohio 44870. Copies not received will be replaced without charge if notice of nonreceipt is given within three months of publication.

Bound volumes and back issues more than two years from A.M.S. Reprint Co., New York, N.Y. 10003. Microform editions from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

The *Antioch Review* is indexed or abstracted in Humanities Index, PAIS International, Historical Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Abstracts of English Studies, Book Review Index, Philosopher's Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, MLA International Bibliography, America: History and Life, Language and Language Behavior Abstracts, American Humanities Index, AIPP.

This issue of the *Antioch Review* was published with the support of the Ohio Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

PREFACE

The Antioch Review, 1941 – 1991: The Survival of the Imagination

When in 1940 a small group of Antioch College faculty met to discuss the founding of a review, they were faced with a world where fascism and communism were on the march. They sought to establish a political forum from which the voice of liberalism could be heard. In 1941 they launched the first number of the *Antioch Review* and in their statement of purpose gave voice to their political and social concerns. Nineteen forty-one was both a dividing point for the dominant issues and trends of the twentieth century and the beginning of a literary, intellectual, or little (you take your pick) magazine that they hardly could have expected to last out the war, never mind fifty years.

But fifty years it is and the fact of its survival is no mean feat. Surviving several international wars, the shifting currents of both the ideological and literary marketplace, not to mention the fortunes of its patron, Antioch College, it has achieved a certain standing in the world. Librarians from Delhi to Dresden know us, writers and critics read us, and two generations of readers remember the *Review* for a particular article, story, or poem that caught their imagination. It has never been just one thing, and since the late nineteen sixties it has addressed several audiences, having by that period moved well beyond the social and political agenda of its founding editors.

Despite certain historical disjunctures, the magazine has devoted its space and energies to particular issues and forms. Throughout the history of the magazine questions about race, ethnicity, sex, education, and the American experience have had a large place. Academic questions — in their formal sense — have not loomed large, and the magazine's policy of refusing to run footnotes is, in fact, a statement about the non- (rather

than anti-) academic nature of the journal. Academics by the score have contributed, but always within a belles-lettres or journalistic tradition. So the magazine was open to Malcolm Bradbury and Eric Bentley, sans footnotes. The *Antioch Review* has always avoided narrow academic debates and tried to suggest that although professors may be for the academy, their commentaries can bear on larger social and intellectual processes. And the *Review* has always tried to be a forum for new writers and ideas in poetry and the short story.

In the nineteen forties the *Review* set out a liberal agenda and not surprisingly one finds essays by Carey McWilliams, Victor Reuther, Lewis Corey, and John Dewey appearing within the first five years. In addition, critical articles about "The Women Problem" and "Married Women Workers in the War" appeared in those early years, along with the justly famous "Richard Wright's Blues" by Ralph Ellison in 1945. Short fiction first appeared in 1942 and poetry in 1945, but an unsigned editorial stressed in the closing year of the war that "interest in democracy and social significance will continue to be the mark of the *Antioch Review*." After the war the political debates continued ("Why Communists Are Not of the Left") yet there was a clear widening of focus with the inclusion of fiction by writers like Vern Sneider (author of the *Teahouse of the August Moon*) and more "social scientists" rather than political economists taking up issues. Robert Merton, David Riesman, and Daniel Bell had all appeared in the magazine by the end of 1951, and Riesman and Bell continued to contribute in the next decade with Riesman (on education) still appearing in the 1980s. During the fifties poetry and fiction began to take (thanks to Nolan Miller) a more prominent place with writers like Philip Levine, Herb Gold, Sylvia Plath, and Alberta Turner beginning to appear alongside such social commentators as James Rorty and James T. Farrell, the novelist. This mixture of poetry, fiction, and essay was most striking in 1957 when Farrell, Plath, Bennett Berger, Lewis Turco, and Clifford Geertz all published in the *Review*. Although the 1960s saw emphasis on issues and subjects relevant to academic interests (special issues on Shakespeare and the classical world), the magazine remained true to an eclectic approach rather than opting for dominant values. One might open the *Antioch Review* in those years before Woodstock and find a long translation of Ortega y Gasset's "The Mission of the Librarian," poetry by Mark Strand and Patricia Goedicke, and Rod Serling on his "Surface View of a Façade." All appeared in a single issue in 1961.

The *Review* had been edited in collective fashion during the early

years and that practice continued into the 1960s with Paul Bixler taking an early editorial lead and Paul Rohmann assuming general control when the magazine came under the Antioch Press. By 1965 the journal had reached its first quarter-century, and Paul Bixler in a notable essay, "Quandaries of a Quarterly," posed some questions about its past and future. "One wonders," he wrote, "whether one man or a little group of men without liberal resources can make an impression these days or whether a small group can continue to sustain one previously established. Television has already taken over vast areas of human communication which were once the province of print, and it may be expected to take more; still it is doubtful if it can or it should replace reading as a significant exercise. Publication itself appears more and more often as the result of large combinations of men and resources, and this is not simply the workings of monopoly or merger in giant associations for economic protection... in this new world, whether a small magazine of mature outlook but minimal resources can sustain itself still appears to be a personal problem." Both the question and its solution still remain in 1991.

The sixties saw a clear falling off of an emphasis on social analysis and a rise in the number of pages devoted to poetry and fiction. Joyce Carol Oates made her first appearance in 1966, William Trevor in 1967, and Quincy Troupe and Harley Mims the same year in a special "Watts Writers Workshop" edited by Budd Schulberg. An editorial shift occurred in 1969 with the appointment of a single editor and a diminution of direct board control in the affairs of the magazine. Under Laurence Grauman the *Review* had a face lift, aspired to be self-consciously controversial, topical, and a trend watcher if not setter. Some notable issues were produced and contemporary issues (the law, censorship) were aired. Daniel Ellsberg, Sidney Zion, James Aronson, Clay Felker, and Charles Newman all made appearances in the early seventies as the magazine both courted and created controversy.

As the *Review* rocketed along so did its primary backer, Antioch College, and both were on a collision course. During 1973 the college experienced both staff and student strikes, and its future and that of the *Review* seemed dim. As the result of a set of bizarre circumstances (including an effort to sell the journal through a "blind" ad in the *New York Review of Books*), the editor was sacked and the college subsidy ended. An almost equally strange set of circumstances rescued the magazine with a substantial grant secured from the Ohio Board of Regents, which carried it while Paul Bixler (one of the original founders)

reestablished its editorial integrity. Bixler, with the help of a new board and a supportive administration, saw the *Review* through several more financial crises.

By the mid-seventies the new *Antioch Review* contained increasing amounts of fiction, had a contemporary look and feel (under art director David Battle) and a commitment to the essay as a form. By then the essay was taught in universities but few academics ventured to use it. When I became editor in 1977 the magazine had survived a major crisis in 1973, but still was on shaky financial ground. Its finances were tested again when the college's subsidy was withdrawn briefly, and from 1979 to the present there has been continuous improvement. Throughout the late seventies and eighties the *Review's* fiction distinguished itself with eight *O. Henry* or *Best American Short Stories* awards. Writers like T. Coraghessan Boyle, Gordon Lish, Maria Thomas, Sharon Stark, and Raymond Carver appeared, and essayists Elaine Showalter, Gerald Early, and David Riesman all contributed substantial (and topical) pieces. During this period Sandra McPherson and then David St. John acted as poetry editors in a separate section devoted to new work. Even though increasing numbers of well-known writers appeared in the *Review*, it continued to draw contributors from the "slush," with two first stories winding up on "best" lists, and T.C. Boyle and the late Maria Thomas publishing here early in their careers. Issue- and geographically oriented numbers appeared with greater frequency, and the focus shifted to other parts of the world with special volumes on China and the Argentine published in the late eighties.

Such changes were dictated not only by editorial considerations but by changing currents on the literary and social scene and by an increasing volume of short fiction that poured into the office. A "special" all-fiction issue was inaugurated to respond to that demand and to our conviction that the short story not only had been neglected but had too few outlets. In the main, the *Review* kept away from particular disciplinary discourses (even though issues did appear on the environment and the new criticism) and kept to the slush for striking fiction, essays, and poetry. That mixture is, I think, represented in this anniversary volume, though the names are by now familiar ones to readers all over the world. In 1984 I wrote that the "Antioch Review has never been considered recreational reading in the style associated with the fodder found in dentists' offices. We have always avoided the stolid quality that pervades academic and professional magazines. We have been described as a 'serious' or 'intellectual' magazine with a presumably serious and

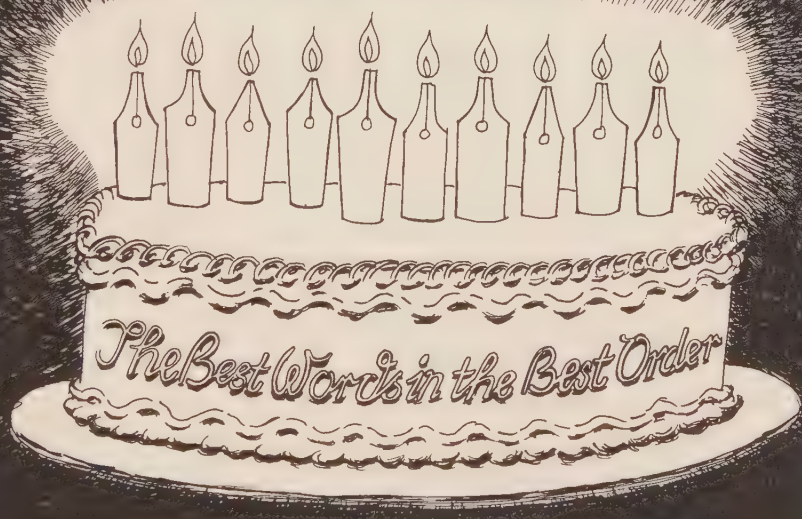
intelligent readership; not quite the sort of material to chew over before a root canal. We publish what interests us and presume that our readers have interests that extend beyond the daily press, the news magazines, *PMLA*, *Isis*, or *Poetry*. In short, they have the habit of inquiry." Later we did a survey and found that 75 percent read several magazines, with the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, and *New York Times Book Review* section heading one pack while the *Georgia Review*, *Antaeus*, and *New England Quarterly* engaged the "little readers." Only one person mentioned subscribing to *Gourmet* and one listed *Your Big Back Yard* as regular fare.

All of the writers here — Ellison, Plath, Riesman, Bell, Strand, Borges, Trevor, Ozick — are writers and critics known from Yellow Springs to Oxford to Beijing as important voices of this century (most from America), voices that spoke and speak to a world transformed since 1941. They need no elaborate introductions, and we hope that by bringing them together in a single volume we honor both them, the magazine that carried their words abroad, and the editors (all) who kept the magazine alive. For the *Antioch Review* serves the imagination, serves an audience of writers and readers, and serves voices still to be heard. The *Antioch Review* has had a distinguished history, and this collection is but a sampler from that history. Several additional volumes could have been produced, and a fifty-year index (to be published separately) reveals other fine essays, stories, and poems.

With this collection we bring to a close a half-century of publishing and begin another from an independent journal of opinion based at an independent liberal arts college in an independent village. One of our friends recently wrote that the *Antioch Review* "freely serves the mind and heart of the free reader." This collection is dedicated to that independent mind and heart, to our creative writers and readers of the past fifty years.

Robert S. Fogarty
Yellow Springs, Ohio
December 1991

The First Decade
1941 – 1950



Editorial Inaugural Issue

Volume 1, Number 1 Spring 1941

Members of the first editorial board were W. B. Alexander, Paul Bixler, Freeman Champney, Charles Gant (business manager), George R. Geiger, Lincoln R. Gibbs, J. Donald Kingsley, and Herman Schnurer.

Subscriptions were \$2.00 per year, single copies fifty cents.

It takes, perhaps, uncommon brashness to plunge into the intellectual struggle at a time which Max Lerner has so aptly described as that of the "breaking of nations." When values are everywhere toppling in the high winds of conflicting dogmas there are those who would seek refuge in a quiet cloister or an ivory tower. Such an escape is not unattractive; it is impossible. No intellectual, almost by definition, can be indifferent today to the social struggle or to the blackout of learning, literature, and the arts which accompanies defeat in that struggle. If the march of fascism has demonstrated nothing else it is that the scholar is not above society, but is inextricably intertwined in its meshes. The destruction of democracy commences with the erosion of the intellectual classes.

The battle for a humanistic social order is, therefore, a matter of prime importance to all intellectuals. Their very existence depends upon victory in that struggle. Yet the argument cannot be allowed to rest on this level of naked self-interest. There are other stakes as well: basic values more precious even than life itself. There is the profound belief in the common man without which humanism is inconceivable. There is the conception, now heretical over most of the world, that men should be viewed as ends and not as means. There is the revolutionary idea that the social order exists for the furtherance of human welfare, rather than for

the glorification of a narrow class. These are a few of the stakes in the gigantic power struggle which is the world's disease. Civilization today is being challenged in a civil war of unexampled magnitude; a civil war of which the present European conflict is merely one expression. What is at stake is the whole complex of values so painfully wrought in the years since the Enlightenment.

For the intellectual to maintain a lofty "objectivity" at such a time is not merely to commit suicide. If no more were involved than the self-destruction of a handful of ineffectuals, others would have little basis for complaints. But the consequences are more serious than this. We are confronted with a situation in which to be silent is to play the midwife at the birth of another Dark Age. The alternatives are clear-cut and unavoidable. He who does not now speak out assists in the degradation of the democratic doctrine as surely as the outright exponent of totalitarianism.

We do not propose to remain silent and it is our purpose to provide a forum for others who feel as we do. We believe in democracy, so strongly that we think it should be enormously extended. We believe that no scholar can fail to view with concern threats against basic human values, whether they originate inside or outside the country. We believe in an instrumental theory of knowledge and in the application of scholarship to the solution of social problems. We believe that the social role of the intellectual in our time is to employ ideas to further democracy in the fullest sense. We believe in the promise of American life and we would seek for the seeds of that promise. This is our purpose in founding a magazine.

Philosophy and Social Change

BY GEORGE R. GEIGER

Volume 1, Number 1 Spring 1941

George Geiger has been on the editorial board since its inception. He is professor emeritus of philosophy at Antioch College. His essays also appeared in the fall 1941, spring 1944, summer 1944, winter 1948, fall 1959, and winter 1965-66 issues.

It is not strange that men have come to apply to philosophy that most deflating of current words, “escapism.” To be sure, escapism is just another way of saying, “I don’t like it.” But it is being said now with a different accent, one implying that every voice which does not sing a song of social significance — and sing it in a certain key — betokens a fugitive from reality. Thus, the scale runs from swing music, bridge, and alcohol on the one extreme to symbolic logic, astronomy, and classical economics on the other (not to mention all the more old-fashioned kinds of ivory tower, like metaphysics and epistemology). Escapism has become a blanket term, covering alike the quick and the dead.

To label philosophy “escapist” seems, therefore, to be at least rhetorically unfortunate. That is to say, there undoubtedly *is* a lot of hocus-pocus to this business of philosophy: to brand great areas of it as defeatist and remote is completely justified. But to do more than that is to show a serious want of discrimination, for philosophy is catholic enough to include the most realistic and subtle sensitivity to the social scene, as well as the most flabby and tepid moral pabulum. Therefore this discussion may well break into two parts, the first suggesting why philosophy has

been rendered suspect in, say, certain liberal circles, and the second proposing an historical interpretation which will allow (or rather force) philosophy to enter the arena of social conflict.

I

The polite raising of eyebrows that greets the student or teacher who confesses to a traffic with it is mute testimony that somehow philosophy is “different.” The inquiring smile occasionally denotes respect, even awe, for there are still those who are dutifully impressed by the inscrutable. But much more frequently, the smile is one of good-natured contempt (sometimes a little less than good-natured). These latter arched eyebrows belong to the emancipated, to the free souls who know quite well that humbug is just humbug. Of course, philosophy itself has been to a greater or less degree responsible for its equivocal reception. It has taken for its own the province of the abstract and of the concept. Its vocabulary and syntax, when not downright meaningless, have been beligerently formidable. Its professed subject-matter has been studded with the most amazingly broad and esoteric questions, questions which not always have implied profundity.

Then there are the more serious of the free souls. For them, not the inscrutability but the ineffectuality of philosophy has been its damnation. Has it not often given them resounding phrases and tricky dialectic and moral opium when they have approached with their tragically sincere questions? These questions, it is true, have not been characteristically about the dear delights of philosophy. They have been questions more sordid, more earthly, downright inelegant, dealing with grubby things like poverty and war, tyranny and ignorance, incompetence and waste.

But, after all, what have these problems to do with philosophy? Philosophy is an august and privileged discipline; the material it considers is refined, insulated, precious — so it has been said. Or rather: these nasty inquiries men raise are handled by social and political philosophy, which is an adjunct of ethics, which is an adjunct of metaphysics — that core of all philosophic thinking. So philosophy can still remain aloof; its skirts are clean. It is this kind of traditional indifference to specific social ills and specific political programs, with its resulting rationalization of existing social and political programs and its sorry defeatism, that has made philosophy appear escapist. In a more technical sense it has been the classic concentration of philosophers upon “metaphysics” and all it

implies for the mind educated in a culture dominated by science and social struggle that has so emphasized philosophic insularity. Can we account, then, for the historical path which philosophy has followed?

In any discussion of this problem, recognition must first be given to the origin and background of philosophic enterprise. For philosophy is not discarnate. Much as we like to think so, it did not spring full-armed from the head of our favorite philosopher. It is not the happy outcome of some virgin birth. Philosophy has a natural history behind it; it is part of human culture. An observation such as this should be superfluous. Certainly it would be were we discussing the nature and function of science or of history. No one could possibly understand, or indeed would try to understand, the schools of history or the evolution of scientific methods without appreciating their cultural backgrounds. The assumption here will be that this same procedure applies to philosophy. It is a human activity functioning in some specific and recognizable pattern of culture.

To be consistent this essay should consequently be an examination of the cultural background of philosophic systems — of course, a palpably impossible task. But the least we can suggest here is to indicate how a few of the dominant characteristics of philosophic speculation, particularly those which have been labeled escapist and “metaphysical,” may be traced to the conditions which surrounded its birth and growth. Fortunately, this discussion can be narrowed to reasonable limits because, first, it would appear that the major emphases of traditional philosophy — at least in terms of long-time trends — have remained largely the same for some two thousand years; and, secondly, these emphases do seem clearly to be the product of a definite period of early culture.

The argument here may be summarily stated in some such fashion as this: The long-time philosophic interest has been (1) to discover a way of knowing that is sure, universal, and revelatory; and (2) to discover a form of reality that is absolute, trustworthy, and the source and preserver of human good. These dominant interests have been captured in Dewey’s pregnant phrase, “the quest for certainty.” Such a tradition of philosophy, the argument continues, must be understood as a striking illumination of a background defined by conditions the very reverse of these philosophic aims — a background dark, uncertain, fraught with peril and mystery, the setting, in other words, of a primitive and prescientific culture. This bald statement must be elaborated.

The elaboration would have to be, first of all, anthropological. That is to say, it would recognize that the elemental roots of philosophy stretch

down into the very dawn of human consciousness. This proto-philosophy was clearly a means for propitiating a forbidding and unintelligible environment. Gods, taboos, animism, mana were all techniques for achieving security. They were means for reading order and comprehension into a whirling flux, for introducing stability into a fugitive background. But, propitiated or not, the hazardous and the uncertain remained. Worship and ritual alone could not build fires — although they might summon into action the ever present Spirit of Flame. Wood and kindling and sparks had to be present, too. Yet this realm of wood and kindling and sparks — this embryonic world of the arts and sciences — was still of an inferior status. For its problems were not always solved; in it there were frustration and failure. The animal did not always fall in the hunt. But in the hunting of the gods there were no misses.

To be sure, all this is a rather presumptuous oversimplification. Yet its main emphases seem to be sound, historically and anthropologically. Those emphases are to the effect that philosophy has developed in the same general area in which were found myth and poetic drama, religion and worship. Science and the practical arts developed in a different direction. That difference in direction is crucial. It seems traceable to the realization by early man that his overt activity — the activity of the hunt, of the making of fire — is always uncertain. The craftsman, the artisan, tries his best, but his instruments are refractory, his senses incomplete and untrustworthy, his results — although often startling — can never be guaranteed. The problems he works with are often too much for him. His knowledge is imperfect, and his materials also. In truth, therefore, he is working in an inferior, a secondary, realm. And this is the dimension of the practical arts and crafts, later, of science and technology.

So there must be another area in which man does not have to distrust himself. Here there need be no bungling with the crude material world, here knowledge is complete and self-sufficient. For in this other realm knowledge means something entirely different from the knowledge of the artisan. His world is located in dealings with specific problems as they arise, but there is a purer world, a mental or spiritual world where one can breathe a cleaner air. (This too, too cleaner air should be the oxygen of our colleges and universities — if our new-model, streamlined, Mortimer Adlerized versions of the Angelic Doctor are to be believed.) This is perforce the “real” world, one of certainty and remoteness, to approach which demands a different and higher method of knowing. Such knowing — to be called philosophical or metaphysical — is precisely to reveal this real world, to give access to it, to contemplate it, not, to be

sure, to change it. Instead of being a supreme productive art, knowledge must be reflective and revelatory of the supernatural — supernatural because the antecedently real is forever before and above the world of mere sense data. Repose in the finality of this real world is the goal of real knowledge, of philosophy. As John Dewey puts it, “we long, amid a troubled world, for perfect being.”

Now, it seems entirely plausible that this split between two different worlds of being and two different techniques of knowing (a split which, of course, has been captured for all time by the classic allegory of Plato’s cave) can be attributed to the class structure of ancient times. Certainly in Greece we find the most startling illustration of this kind of dualism. The historical essays of Dewey are perhaps the most incisive treatment of this whole problem, but social and economic historians of all schools, Marxist or not, have paid concentrated attention to the effects that a Greek leisure class, supported by a slave and artisan class, have had upon the history of western philosophy. The Greek philosopher’s scorn for manual labor is familiar enough to be almost comic. We read with amusement that even the godlike sculptors, whose work has made the term “classic” all but a synonym for ancient Greek, were disdained as merely craftsmen, as artisans who used not their pure reason but their lowly hands. The practical, the material, the sense world just did not count—at least in relation to philosophy, to “real” knowledge. Thus, the breathtaking audacity of Plato in insuring that his philosopher-kings would study astronomy but let the stars alone! If all this does not seem like the rationalizing of a dominant leisure class, then social history needs to be rewritten.

This argument must not be misunderstood. There is nothing *wrong* in this kind of rationalizing or self-justification. Every class in power does it, be they primitive medicine men, or Brahmin priests, or Athenian high-minded gentlemen, or English bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, or—a good bet—the proletariat at the end of the twentieth century. The point is simply that this self-glorification must be understood for what it is. For example, we point out constantly that liberalism and *laissez faire* can be fully appreciated only as the rationalizing of a rising commercial class coming into opposition with a controlling landed aristocracy. This, of course, does not mean that liberalism, therefore, is either wrong or right. But it does mean that when we use the concept of liberalism today we should know its antecedents, and should realize that the word does not, and cannot possibly, mean the same thing now that it did a century ago. A similar approach might well be followed in discuss-

ing the concepts of philosophy; there would then be less danger of making philosophy today mean just what it did for an age which preceded the rise of experimental inquiry.

For experimental inquiry has introduced a revolution which has almost completely negated the traditional "quest for certainty." Specifically has there been repudiated the interpretation of knowledge which makes it revelatory of some monolithic reality, fixed and absolute. This perhaps requires brief elaboration.

It should be familiar that science is not constituted by any particular body of material. The word *method* is crucial. In fact, the conviction that method is more important than conclusion is the very essence of scientific experimentalism. Historically it was indeed this concentration upon technique that provided the magic to transform out of a supernatural theology and philosophy what we now know as physical science. Yet no worship of physical science is intended by such an observation. Nor does the experimental method mean the carrying on of a certain specified laboratory routine, for all aspects of experience are equally real and they demand their own treatments. Neither is experimentalism limited to the use of tricky machinery. In its widest sense, the experimental method signifies opposition to fixed ends, to system-making and changelessness; it signifies a refusal to divorce thought from action. It stands for provisionalism and tentativeness, the reliance upon working hypotheses rather than upon immutable principles. In this way, science is by no means limited to the professional scientist; it represents an attitude that can function in any area of experience, an attitude of free and effective intelligence. The extension of such a temper would be indeed the "unified science" that is being sought in many circles.

Therefore, science cannot accept problems or the properties of objects — much less something called Reality — which are set up in advance of experimental operation, set up, that is to say, in terms of a certain and superior existence which is waiting only to be revealed. Scientific knowing implies the control and change of experienced objects, not their revelation. In Dewey's words, "any allegiance to even the smallest minimum of belief so fixed in advance that it can never be modified is unscientific." In short, scientific knowing, a "thumping-and-pushing" kind of knowing, is a way of experiencing objects which introduces a control over them. Indeed, that statement would be a synopsis of the history of experimental science. And this knowing implies an operational technique, one which substitutes data for objects. Thus, the value of knowledge depends upon the way in which it is reached; and that way,

as we have noted, involves provisionalism, practical activity, and the (“metaphysical”) assumption that nature reacts to manipulation, that it is not unchanging and aloof. The supreme value of scientific knowing turns out to be the “supremacy of method,” whereas the supreme value of classic philosophic knowing was its quest for certainty.

II

Now, the present essay is not so much interested in an exposition of scientific method or in the cultural background of the history of traditional philosophy. It is interested in what may *now* be regarded as the function of philosophy; but it is felt sincerely that these first two points have been necessary as background and orientation.

The major argument, then, can be expressed along these lines: First, from a negative standpoint, the business of philosophy is not to construct a picture of nature which is to rival that given us by science, for, despite Dr. Adler and his medievalists, philosophy can lay no claim to some “extra superfine” brand of knowledge having its own peculiar privileges and warrants. From a positive approach, the purpose of philosophy seems to be (1) to examine and criticize scientific method, particularly in terms of disclosing the significance, possibly unrecognized, of certain basic problems and assumptions; (2) to help extend the experimental method to fields, such as the social sciences, for example, where that method has not been sufficiently understood or trusted; and (3) above all, to apply experimental operation to problems of values, so as to help break down the truly tragic barrier between the physical and the moral realms; in other words, “to help put beliefs about the nature of things and beliefs about values together.”

Without recalling the familiar textbook discussions of the relations between philosophy and science, it still may be appropriate to group these three positive functions under the general heading of philosophy-and-science. For that seemingly innocuous and academic label may help catalogue what can well be the most shattering puzzle human intelligence is called upon to face, a riddle of the Sphinx which not to answer means to be destroyed. It is the glaring failure of the human mind to solve, or even to understand, the problems which, by a miracle of understatement, have come to be known simply as “social problems” — questions of ethics, of values, of judgment and choice, fundamental questions concerning themselves with nothing less than war and poverty and human disaster.

The gloomy collapse of reflective thinking in this whole area is principally a methodological one, and it has impressed men like John Dewey probably more than has any other human phenomenon. The incredible gap between technological advance and the application of that advance to the moral scene is nothing less than the almost deliberate abdication of intelligence from an entire dimension, and the most precious, too, of human experience. After all, it is no secret why there have been fantastic revolutions in the development of physical science; any good history book will report the reasons. Man has finally learned to use experimental inquiry in the fields that have now come to be designated as "scientific." It is gratuitous to add that these fields were not indigenously "scientific," or that they indeed *became* "scientific" as they responded to the employment of a technique. The point here to lament is the divorce of such a recognized method from social and ethical problems. The unbelievable lag in referring the recognized scientific attitude to disciplines other than the natural studies is so commonplace that it has become the occasion for good-natured humor. We are indeed confronted with what, in another setting, Lewis Mumford has called a pseudomorph — a cultural hangover. We seem not to be worried that, outside of the recognized natural sciences, much of our "thinking" is in a pre-Baconian if not a pre-Copernican stage. It is exactly this fatal hesitation that has so profoundly disturbed a whole generation of thinkers.

Therefore, it would appear that one of the great tasks of philosophy today is to act, in a sense, as a communicating agency between the scientific techniques and the values that man has set before himself. This would be a genuine relation between philosophy and science. It does not mean that philosophy would act simply as a mechanical link. It would function in both spheres, being identified with neither. In terms of an insistence upon methodology, upon the means and significance of experimental inquiry and active intelligence, philosophy would coincide with much of the work of science; whereas in terms of a concern with basic meanings, with values, with the enlargement of horizons, philosophy would be more nearly a thing of vision, of perspective and imagination. It is this kind of functional connection that is vital. Here philosophy would achieve a real synthesis of the sciences, not in some Spencerian sense of wrapping all the separate bundles of the sciences into one big package with a single, appropriate label, but in making science operative in solving the grand, the tragic, questions. We can have no single "system" of unified science, except "in the sense of a systematic attack upon problems and a systematic use of whatever material we have available."

This kind of a relation between philosophy and science makes certain assumptions. First, it will be evident that the critical approach of philosophy must operate within a living culture and be most consciously aware of the problems of its own background. This is why philosophy must concern itself jointly with the problems of scientific method and of the social world, for it is with them unquestionably that modern culture must deal — philosophy aiding or not. Basic problems can be solved only in terms of the setting in which they arise. If philosophy is to deepen and sharpen our awareness of genuinely fundamental problems, they must be relevant ones.

A second observation, really a corollary of the first, is that this critical function of philosophy is one of evaluation. It is nothing new, of course, to argue that philosophy should discuss values; they have been its distinctive subject-matter ever since philosophy became articulate. The point here is to emphasize that values must be discussed consciously and carefully. True, philosophy may always have talked about values, but so often the philosophers seemed to have been unaware of the very set of standards which made them talk the way they did. Now, when it is suggested that philosophy's direction must be towards values, there should not arise the easy delusion that the "right" philosophy will give us the "right" system of values. Instead, this emphasis means no more — and also, quite definitely, no less — than that philosophy must present, in this area of values, a technique of criticism. To help clarify the meaning and significance of value problems, above all to appraise them in terms of their consequences, to see how they work and where they function — this must be the grubby and "semantical" work of philosophy, a work as pedestrian yet as shattering as that of any great intellectual revolution.

A third assumption of this view of philosophy is, to be sure, a heightened sensitivity to the dominance of social philosophy. There is no occasion here to defend the "social reform" approach, especially to show that it does not derogate from the dignity of philosophy. Yet it may be put down once more that unless our experience of values — the things we have judged to be precious and worth choosing — and our experience (scientific or metaphysical or mystical) of "the world" can come together, we are indeed lost. The integration of nature, human or nonhuman, with the purposes and meanings conceived by man seems to be the great problem, not merely of philosophy — which, after all, is pretty academic — but the great problem of human intelligence itself. This last assumption of philosophy's "social significance" perhaps deserves further elaboration here.

It was William James who phrased one of the most poetic descriptions of philosophy when he termed it a name for unanswered questions. That phrasing well suggests the fascination which has been forever attached to the philosophic enterprise, the fascination of playing with profound riddles whose solutions are not waiting at the back of the book. But of much more weight in such a description is the implied challenge. For what are the unanswered questions that today shriek for attention? They no longer reside — if they ever did — in “sterile metaphysics and sterile epistemology”; neither are they inhabitants of some completely formal realm of sign-manipulation. In social relations and conflicts, in political and economic struggles, in a depressed ethics and a fumbling education, in war and peace and revolution — here are to be found the questions that plead for answers. The failure to answer them, even to notice them, is the tragic and, it may well be, fatal indictment of human intelligence. If philosophy is indeed the name for unanswered questions, then this is its field.

Thus, social philosophy can claim to be the heart of all philosophy. It can make this claim in two ways. First, as has just been noted, social philosophy is linked with the very genesis of all philosophic enterprise — the concern with “questions of the most perplexing and significant sort.” The second way in which social philosophy presents its claim is methodological and historical. That is to say, an examination of the history of philosophy and, above all, of the development of scientific method should throw a flood of light on the extraordinary insolvency of much of our social thinking. This bankruptcy of great sections of economic and political speculation may indeed be traced to the point of view that regards intelligence as revelatory instead of as instrumental; the social disciplines seem to have followed the lead of traditional “philosophy” rather than that of “science.” Here is where a living philosophy can perform the liaison function that has been suggested in this essay, the function of relating the techniques of scientific method to the whole area of human values. Above all, philosophy can point to what is implied by instrumentalism, by the experimental method. Its pointing might indicate some such path as this:

The installation of an experimental method would indeed constitute a true Copernican revolution in social and political philosophy because it would dislocate the orbit of social speculation which to so great an extent is now centered in fixed concepts and bound to them by what Dewey has termed “the logic of general notions.” General notions and universal principles end investigation instead of initiating it. (Especially do they

end it in favor of the status quo.) But the demand of experimentalism is always for the specific formulation and diagnosis of problems, for data, for provisional multiple-working hypotheses, for the testing of beliefs by consequences, for empirical verification. More than anything else, such an approach requires that programs cannot be determined in advance. This is fundamental. It does not mean — as caricaturists would have it mean — that the instrumentalist starts from a vacuum with no concepts and theories whatsoever. It does mean that concepts and theories be used as tools of inquiry to advance investigation instead of to block it. It does mean that programs of action be regarded as working hypotheses to be supported or repudiated, as they are in the natural sciences, by the consequences which follow.

This may all sound plausible if dull. But the acceptance of such a policy would remove from social and political philosophy some of our most cherished playthings. It would make thinking in this field a matter of gathering prosaic facts and putting forward tentative and halting explanations, risking them to ridicule and collapse at every moment, accepting their collapse and trying other solutions — all of which would be considered by many thinkers as dreadfully dreary and grubby business, quite different from that warm and pleasing irrelevance of after-dinner conversation which constitutes so much of our social consciousness. It would mean, in short, a revolution in thought just as middle-class and unspectacular, but just as stupendous, as the revolution in industry of a century ago.

It would mean also an end of the too easy strictures that have been directed against “science” because of its alleged responsibility for the world tragedy in which man today finds himself. This is in no way an apology or whitewash for the very evident sins of the natural scientists. Indeed, it is only within the last few desperate years that the men of science seem to be rousing themselves to what is going on about them, although even that rousing has done all too little to disturb seriously the prevailing lethargy. The general imperviousness to questions of values still remains. But that is a theme of its own which can profitably be handled elsewhere. The present argument is turned to the philosophers rather than to the natural or social scientists, and it is pointing to the *method* of science. Any wholesale indictment of “science” therefore should be changed, its attention redirected to the unthinkable stupidity of using scientific *method* to extend interests which preceded its rise instead of to modify men’s social acts and attitudes. The benefits of science have not been spread out; and in this conflict between prescientific ideas and

postscientific realities has been nourished a struggle more portentous than any in economic history. In fact, it is not simply democracy or capitalism that is now on trial in the world. That would be almost too simple a problem. Collective intelligence itself is at stake. The great scientific revolution is still to come.

For the moment, that revolution seems far distant. Indeed, a counter-revolution seems now aflame. In no other way can we describe, even in allegedly democratic circles, the distrust of critical thinking, of provisional hypotheses, of the specific — perhaps piecemeal — handling of specific problems, of patience which is truly reflective and exploratory — in a word, the distrust of liberalism and democracy. This is not the place for one more excursion in defense of such ideas, especially since, if we are to be at all consistent, their defense would have to be in terms of methodology. And one can't drum up much of a peroration on methods. This is no place either for one more jeremiad. The apostles of pessimism are sufficiently eloquent, and almost they persuade us. At least, one cannot forbear noting the too neat correlation between contemporary impatience with instrumentalism and contemporary seduction by dialectic. From neoscholastic theories of education to neopagan worship of godlike leaders and god-created states, punctuated by — save the mark — dialectical materialism, there is the cry for soothing concepts. Let us, above all, be comfortable in our minds! Experimentalism is distinctly unsatisfying and discomfiting, for it gives us nothing to which to hold fast except a dry-bones method, halting, tentative, vacillating. It is the typical philosophy of liberalism, and no more need be said. And if this be totalitarianism, let us make the most of it!

This apparent revolt against an instrumentalist philosophy is something more than a reaction to any single thinker, say, to John Dewey. It is part of a larger movement, a movement which is the current expression of the tender-minded retreat. That escape has taken many forms, all of them showing little stomach for the incorrigible toughness which refuses to succumb to formulas, all of them distrustful of criticism and analysis, in fine, of scientific method. The success or failure of that revolt can be predicted only in terms of our present mood. But unless we are blackly pessimistic, it is certainly premature to foretell the permanent abdication of reflective thinking — even from international relations.



All this, then, seems to be implied by the assumption that philosophy today must mean social philosophy. Here are the relevant, the scream-

ingly relevant, questions: here are the unanswered, and crying-for-answers, questions. Here is the locus of man's most precious values — those found in free thinking and free enjoyment, in human dignity and decency and intelligence. Here is the shadow-land where methods of thinking have stumbled.

Philosophy is now confronted by as serious a dilemma as any human enterprise has ever faced. If the brutalitarian way of life emerges as definitive from the present world convulsion, philosophy becomes meaningless. But if the scheme of life which, with such typically Anglo-Saxon understatement, we call "democratic" survives, philosophy will still be under a cloud unless in some way it has helped to realize or to define that kind of life. If it keeps its hands immaculate — and in some circles it seems pathetically eager to do just that — then it is indeed the luxury for the idle that has always aroused suspicion, the way of dishonorable escape. Men must make fundamental choices these days as perhaps they never have made them before. If it is not too late, philosophy must choose along with them.

Homecoming

BY JESSIE TREICHLER

Volume 2, Number 2 Summer 1942

Jessie Treichler's story was the first piece of fiction to appear in the Antioch Review. It was part of a novel, *Cora Gray*, and won the Best American Short Stories Award in 1943. She was on the staff of Antioch College for many years; she died in 1972.

Cottonwood, Montana, 1909

We're almost to Cottonwood, Ma'am," the conductor said in Cora's ear. "You wanted me to tell you."

Cora Gray nodded. She was too tired after the long trip from Iowa to Montana by day coach with three children even to smile at him. She looked out the window at the flat, sagebrush-studded, coulee-scarred country of eastern Montana, bright and dry beneath the late August sun, and tried to realize that in this land would be their new home.

It was so different from the oak-topped knolls of the country she had known that she could in no way identify herself with it. It was a land of brown and gray and white with no green to relieve its glare. Light-brown tufts of grass pushed up from parched brown earth. Parched brown earth was cut through by coulees of still deeper brown, with bits of mica sparkling on their dry banks. Stretches of dead-white alkali land where nothing grew made the glare from the sun more intense. Greenish-gray sagebrush was everywhere — an ugly weed, thought Cora. Cacti — mean, stunted plants that clung tightly to the unsustaining earth and rocks — were almost as plentiful as the bushes of sage.

Cora turned away from the window to meet the gaze of her oldest child, a quiet, thin-faced boy of twelve with her own gray eyes.

“Joe, we’re almost to Cottonwood. You wrap up that lunch box, and pick up the children’s books and crayons and put them in that basket. Help Barbie into her coat.”

Joe shut his book resignedly and turned to his dark and scowling five-year-old sister. “Here we are, Sis. We’re going to see Papa in just a few minutes.”

Barbie showed no signs of pleasure. “You said there’d be lots of Indians in Montana, and we haven’t seen a one yet. You told a big fib, Joe.”

Cora leaned over her other son, Jeff, the baby of the family. While Cora patted and shook him into unhappy consciousness, she handed articles of clothing and baggage to Joe to assemble on the seat across the aisle, mentally checked the things they had brought with them, sighed over the things they had left behind, and worried over whether the dishes and bedding sent ahead had arrived.

Cora had thought it was a wild and foolish thing Will Gray was doing when he decided to leave their home and relatives in southeastern Iowa to go to Montana. She had felt a sense of insecurity from that first winter night in 1908 when he came home with a newspaper telling about the thousands of easterners pouring into Montana to prove up on dry land farms.

“It says the great cattle days are over, but there’s still a great new land out there, Cora,” he had said. “It’s got room — lots of room — room fer us. Room fer the kids. Room fer cattle and sheep and wheat. My own belief is that it says right.”

She had made her only remonstrance, that a faint one. “You’re a carpenter, Will, not a farmer.”

“Hell, Cora, farmers need carpenters. All those people — they ain’t a-goin’ t’ live out there long without needin’ houses and banks and schools. Then there’s this new railroad — the Milwaukee. It’ll soon be finished — right across the state. Wherever it touches, towns’ll spring up like toadstools. We’ll follow it clear across Montana. Maybe clear t’ the Pacific ocean. There’ll be more carpenter work than a man ever saw before. And maybe I won’t be just a carpenter out there. Maybe I’ll hire men t’ work for me and be the boss. The country’s big. The country’s free. No tellin’ what’ll happen if you git in on the ground floor. Why God-dammit, Cora, I see it all just as clear as if it was right here in this room. We gotta go.”

When Will swore like that, Cora knew he was in earnest. Besides he was twelve years older than she was, and she always felt presumptuous

when she questioned anything he wanted to do. She had had some normal school education and had taught a country school, and he had gone through country school only; yet she felt no superiority because of her better education. Cora believed that an education was only as good as the man who received it, and never questioned Will's decisions because of the grammar in which they were phrased.

So he had told her farewell and had gone out to Montana to follow a railroad across its great length, and, as he predicted, he had found all the work he could do. He had become a contractor instead of a carpenter, and bid on buildings, and bossed their erection. He had just completed a depot, he wrote her; then he had built a saloon; soon he would be working on a bank. He had teamsters and lathers and bricklayers working under him. But he had no capacity for putting aside money, when the building was booming, for the long winter months when the thermometer was at thirty-five below and no work could be done. He had sent Cora large sums during the summer months, and her heart had bloomed; but long winter months had used up the summer's money. And another summer had had to be worked through before he could save this stake which now brought his family to him. All these things Cora turned over in her mind as she buttoned her two-year-old son into clean rompers, combed her daughter's hair, settled the navy blue sailor on her own light brown hair, and lifted bags down from the hat rack and pulled them out from under the seat. The conductor came and helped Joe move them to the door. The train began to slow down. She saw Will's big, slightly stooped figure on the platform, his hat off, the gray strands in his black hair gleaming in the blistering sun. She pressed her quivering lips and lifted Jeff to her.

"Joe, take Barbie's hand, and don't let her fall going down the steps. Barbie, you kiss your father even if he isn't an Indian."



Cora's fatigue didn't leave her as Will gathered her into his arms; it was too deep for that; but the fear went from her, and was replaced by a deep feeling of peace. At last she was here, with Will; and everything would be all right. Jeff started to whimper, and they both realized for the first time that she was still holding him. Will swung Jeff to his own shoulder, but kept one arm about Cora.

"I'd forgotten how little and pretty you are!" he exclaimed with pleasure.

He turned to the man in overalls lounging beside a team and wagon.

“Jim, you take these here suitcases and things up t’ my house, will you? Cora, this is Jim Shaw who does all our draying around these parts. Jim, this is Mrs. Gray.”

“I’m mighty pleased t’ meet yuh, Mrs. Gray. Bill here’s sure had ants in his pants these last few weeks he’s bin so scairt he wouldn’t git that house ready fer yuh t’ move in — ” Shaw broke off in a high cackle, rather red in the face and breathless from performing his social duty.

“How do you do,” Cora said politely. Then she turned to Will with shining eyes. “Will, you built a house for us!”

Will blushed. “No, not exactly — No. I bought one and fixed it up a little.”

“You’re jest lucky you come when you did, Mrs. Gray,” Shaw said importantly. “I reckon you’d ’a slep’ in a tent or been et up with bedbugs in the Comfort Inn. This house you got was vacated jest in time. Mighty important vacatin’ too!”

Will interrupted him, friendly but firm. “You’ll be wantin’ t’ take up them barrels of dishes and things in the freight shed, too, Jim. I reckon they’d better go up now. You drop by the job, and I’ll pay you what I owe you. Much obliged. Well, so long, Jim.”

“So long, Bill. Mighty glad I met yuh, Mrs. Gray.”

“Thank you. I’m glad I met you, too.” Cora smiled shyly at the redfaced man, wanting to make friends with anyone who called her husband “Bill.”

“My, he’s friendly, Will. It’s nice he could take our things right up that way.”

“Yeah, he’s all right. But he talks too much.”

“What did he mean about the house, Will?”

“ ’Twas the only one in town, Cora, and we’re lucky to git it. I never would ’a got time t’ build one. You know the old sayin’ about the shoe-maker’s children goin’ barefoot. Well, that’s me all right, right now.”

“Well, I don’t care what kind of a house it is. It’ll be home. He said it was a mighty important vacating — ”

“I told you he talks too much. I’ll tell you all about it later. We’ll go home, and you’ll see the house for yourself.” He smiled at his wife apologetically. “It’ll be all right.” Still she couldn’t help but wonder about it.

“I’m glad you’re here — you ’n the kids. By God, I’ve missed you! Barbie, get out from under that horse’s belly! He ain’t your grandfather’s old mare!”

Barbie came out from under the horse hurriedly. Cora said with feeling, “I’ve missed you, too.” Then she added practically, “And I’m glad

you're going to make Barbie mind. She's too much for me sometimes."

The small procession moved away from the red station up a narrow main street, walking on wooden planks laid down on one side of it. The street seemed almost empty to Cora as they started to walk its short length. She was relieved about this, for in spite of having put on a clean shirtwaist and run a chamois over her freshly washed face, she was conscious that her appearance after three nights on a day coach left much to be desired. But her relief was short-lived, for she soon saw that she was mistaken about the deserted street. Women's faces began to appear at store windows, and men began to call greetings from doorways. The small frame store-buildings lining the street were filled with people.

"The whole town's come down t' see you, Cora," Will said jocularly.

Cora was shocked, but as she thought quickly of the size of the town and the number of people she saw at doors and windows, she realized that what he said must be the truth. Loud cries of "Howdy, Bill!" and "So the Missus finally arrived!" were greeted by Will with equally demonstrative bellows of satisfaction. He bowed and waved to everyone, sometimes almost throwing Jeff into the air in the exuberance of his joy. Everyone seemed to know him, and Cora again got the feeling of great friendliness on the part of the people who greeted him from store fronts on both sides of the street. She felt her face redden with a certain pleasure as well as embarrassment. She was glad these people so evidently liked her husband, but she would also have been glad to have felt a little less as if she were being greeted by a brass band.

They came to a new, small red-brick building at the corner of the first of the two blocks which made up the town's main street. It had a plate glass window in the front of it, like a store. But it also had a green shade pulled down at the window, a swinging door, and gold lettering on the glass which proclaimed that this was "Mike Finley's Bar." A worn hitching rail at one side contrasted with the new brick of the building, as the two ponies hitched to the posts contrasted with a new but slightly battered Model-T Ford.

A tall, lean man with a white Stetson pushed back to show graying hair stood in the doorway. After a day spent staring out of day coach windows at the Montana countryside, Cora was prepared somehow for such a man. His weathered face was brown as the land was brown. But his face was saved from the harshness of the land by the eyes, a deeper brown and soft and sad as a retriever's, that looked out from it.

"Howdy, Bill," the man said. His words made a great impression on

Cora, not because they were unusual, but because the sober way in which he said them struck jarringly on the general paeon of joy which had greeted them so far.

“Howdy, Mike,” Will said cordially. “Cora, I want you to meet Mr. Finley. Mike, Mrs. Gray.”

“Pleased to meet you, I’m sure, Mr. Finley,” Cora said nervously. She had never seen a saloon before, much less a saloon-keeper, and she wasn’t sure just what the proper greeting should be.

“And I’m pleased to meet you, Mrs. Gray,” said Mr. Finley, coming from the doorway to the middle of the plank walk. He swept off his Stetson with a serious, almost courtly air and gave her a slow but not unfriendly smile. “You’re getting here just in time to see all these fine buildings your husband’s putting up. Mine here — we just moved in a few days ago. And the bank down the street — it’ll be the same pattern — the same red brick. Cottonwood’s going to have the finest main street in the West, bar none, before we get through with it.”

His tone indicated that this would be a great misfortune for Cottonwood as well as the West.

“That will be nice, I’m sure.” Cora found herself unconsciously speaking in the same tone of hushed sorrow which he had used.

“Oh, Papa, come on!” Barbie had suddenly come back from her confident stalking. She was almost in tears from fatigue and nervousness, and her voice sounded angrier than usual.

“Barbie, be quiet! There’s no need to be impatient; we’ve got all day.” Even as she spoke, Cora realized that she was as tired as her daughter and as impatient to be gone from this sad stranger who talked lugubriously to her from in front of a saloon.

“Don’t scold the little ones, Mrs. Gray,” Mr. Finley said, and Cora couldn’t be sure that he wasn’t laughing at her. “Sometimes they die when you’re least expecting it.” He turned to Barbie. “What is your name, little girl?” Again he lifted his upper lip in a sad smile.

Barbie drew herself very erect. “Barbara Dolores Gray. And I’m going on six!”

“Dolores. Dolores — I once knew a girl named Dolores. Hm-m-m. Never mind. Here’s a nickel, Dolores — you buy yourself a box of crackerjack to remember Mike Finley by.”

“My name isn’t really Dolores, Mr. Finley. That’s my middle name. But it was almost Dolores. Mamma named me Barbara for my Aunt Barbie who was dying. After she died I was to be called Dolores. But she didn’t die. So now I’m still Barbie.”

"Hush, Barbie. Don't mind her, Mr. Finley. She's tired from too much riding on the train. Will, we'll have to get the children home. Goodbye, Mr. Finley."

He bowed deeply once more, and sighed. "I am happy to have made your acquaintance, Mrs. Gray. So long, Bill."

"So long, Mike."

Happy to be on the move once more, Barbie smiled at him angelically. To her mother, she said, "Now may I buy some crackerjack?"

Cora made no reply until she was sure they were well out of earshot. Then she said fiercely, "You just tie that nickel in your handkerchief and save it for your Sunday School! It'll be one piece of whiskey money that's gone to the right place."

Will laughed. "Beer money, Cora, beer money. A nickel wouldn't even get you a smell of a whiskey cork in Mike's place."

Cora had felt only a surprised acceptance of a strange situation when Will had stopped in front of a saloon and introduced her to a saloonkeeper, but now at his casual laughter she found herself feeling both resentful and fearful. She wondered how much of his time in her absence he had spent sitting around the saloon. Vaguely she characterized sitting around a saloon as "carrying on," though, to save her life, she could not have put into more explicit words what she meant by the phrase.

Whatever she might have to say about her fears would have to wait until some other time. Her weariness was beginning to come upon her in recurring waves. Four steps, and a wave would engulf her, weakening her knees, making the small buildings of the street jiggle before her eyes. Another four steps, another wave.

Cora hardly knew how she managed to walk the half-mile which took them to the outskirts of the tiny town. There were no sidewalks, and they trudged down the middle of a straggling road, past small, unpainted houses which she did not see. Sometimes they stumbled over stones or hard clods of dirt. Brief gusts of a high, sweet wind made shifting eddies of dust about them. Fortunately they met no one with whom Will felt it obligatory to exchange more than a "Howdy," or a wave of his hand.

"Here's our house, Cora," she heard Will say, and she opened her smarting lids.

Before them was a small house covered with black tar-paper held in place by strips of lathing. Two little windows, placed rather high, shone in the sunlight. New, unpainted, wooden steps led directly up to a new,

unpainted door. Sagebrush grew around the house, cleared away only from the path leading to a small but necessary building about fifty feet to the rear of the house. A fresh pile of stove wood had been dumped almost at the door. It was a lame duck of a house, if there ever was one, but Cora's heart went out to it as she saw weeks of hard labor ahead of her — scrubbing floors, shining windows, putting up curtains, clearing away sagebrush — labor which she hoped would make the house look less as though it had been dumped from a refuse cart. Her fingers itched to begin.

Barbie gave a horrified snort. "Gosh, Papa, do we have to live here! This is just an awful old place!"

"Be quiet, Barbie!" her mother said automatically. "Stop your sniffing and just be thankful we're home." To her husband she said gently, "Will, it's just as nice as it can be."

The Second Day

The room was faint with early morning light. Sleepily Cora looked at the unfamiliar walls covered with dirty, faded, blue building-paper, stained by the rains from many storms. She lay in a brass bed in the corner of the one large room which was to serve as living room, dining room, and bedroom for her and Will. The bed was battered and bent, but it had seemed completely beautiful to Cora the night before. For the first time in her life she had gone to bed before the supper dishes were washed. Now she became more awake as she realized that she would have to wash them before any breakfast could be served to a hungry husband and ravenous children. She stretched and yawned, and noticed with surprise that the fatigue of yesterday was gone. She felt, without being conscious of it, the exciting tang of the air. It was good to be alive, and she didn't need anyone to tell her so; she felt it in her very bones. Tentatively she rubbed a toe against Will's solid leg. He had always been ticklish, and she smiled as he flinched and pulled his leg away. He rolled over, and opened a heavy eye.

"That's a fine way t' wake up a husband after a year's absence," he grumbled happily, throwing an arm about her shoulder.

"Will, you'll just have to shingle that roof, even if the bank doesn't get finished. See where the rain has stained the ceiling."

He laughed softly. "Up to your old tricks! Wake a man up by tickling him so's you can tell him all the things that need to be done. You wouldn't like that sagebrush all pulled up by noon today, would you?"

Cora giggled. "Yes, I would, but I don't suppose I need think about that for a while yet. I'll put Joe to doing that after school."

"Chains around their necks 'fore they're outa short pants." Will's tone carried both amusement and chagrin. "Your Pennsylvania Dutch blood always shows up early in the morning."

Cora rubbed her hand along his arm with unwonted demonstrativeness, and kissed him hesitantly.

"I was too tired yesterday to tell you how glad I am that we got here."

"I knowed you was, Cora. And you knowed I was. That's the way it oughta be. This is an awful dump t' bring you to, but it was all I could git."

Will sounded so much more apologetic to Cora than the situation seemed to warrant that she found her curiosity of the day before revived.

"You said you'd tell me about the house, Will. How'd you happen to get it? Who lived here, anyway? They didn't take very good care of it."

"Well, Cora, I'll tell you —" Will cleared his throat. "I was gonna tell you yesterday. Now don't git up on your high horse — just remember it's the only house in town." Will paused again. "Well, Cora, this used t' be a bad house, and some women who weren't — well, some whores had it till two weeks ago. Then some of the wives around here thought it didn't look so good for Cottonwood t' have a bad house right inside the town, seein' that ever'body's tryin' t' build the town up to be something. So they made their men tell these women they'd have t' clear out. I heard they was a-movin', and come over an' bought the place. That's all there is to it."

Cora lay still, too horrified to make a sound. Here she lay in a house in which, just a short time before, other women had lain for quite a different purpose. She felt suddenly angry at Will, angrier than she had ever been before. Her thoughts were jumbled, and at first she felt chiefly outraged that Will had put her in such an unfair position before their new neighbors. What would people think of her anyway to come into a place like this one? What would her mother think when she wrote to Iowa? Quickly she decided that she wouldn't write her mother this particular fact about their new home. She looked about the room furtively. In spite of herself, she found that it had assumed a new interest. Her glance traveled up and down the ugly, stained walls wonderingly. She had never thought about it much, but she had somehow pictured sin in more seductive surroundings. This homely room with its board floors and creaking windows seemed a test for only those strengthened by the most

hardy virtue. She tried to put her thoughts into words.

“It seems funny women like that would live in a place like this.”

Will looked at her in amazement. “Well, I’ll be damned! I thought you’d have a fit.”

She made a wry face at him. “I feel a little like having a fit,” she admitted. “But I don’t see what can be done about it. The children can’t sleep out of doors with winter coming on, and we can’t afford to go to a hotel.”

He gave a relieved laugh. “I pictured everything, Cora, but I never pictured you’d see it so clear. Cottonwood’s so different from every place you ever knowed before that I didn’t know how to tell you about it in letters. Everything’s different. Mike Finley now. You thought it was funny I’d stop in front of a saloon with you, and talk to him. But he’s a respected citizen here. He paid me good money for building that place of his, and he’s always been fine to me, and I knowed everybody’d think it pretty funny if I didn’t introduce you right away.”

“He acted so sad at my being here I thought he was afraid he’d lose some trade.”

Will laughed again. “Well, you kin just put that thought outa yer head. A glass of beer and a game a pinochle’s about all he ever gets outa me. He always acts sad. It’s just his way. But he’s a nice fella, Cora. Only different from anybody you knowed back home.”

“Has he got a wife?” Some of Cora’s fear that she might have to be friends with a saloon-keeper’s wife came through into her voice.

“Not — not a wife — ”

Cora looked at him. “Oh — that.” She half turned away in distaste. “I don’t have to be nice to *her*, do I?”

“Good God, no! Mike’d be the last to expect it. You don’t have t’ be nice to him, fer that matter, Cora. I don’t want you t’ feel you gotta bootlick people because it’s good business. I just like the guy. It ain’t got a damned thing t’ do with business.”

Again Cora giggled. “No, I guess I won’t bootlick. I’m not much better than you are at that. You know, it’s funny, Will, but I kind of liked him, too. Giving that nickel to Barbie, and all. I know what you mean — How many women lived here, anyway?”

“Five, I guess, but that’s hearsay. I didn’t visit the house but that one time I come t’ buy it, and I just saw two.” He laughed hugely. “How’d you think I got any work done with all the drinkin’ and gamblin’ and runnin’ after women you act as if I done?”

“No, that’s not it. But, my goodness, five women — in these three

little rooms! And at least one of them must have been a kitchen. How do you suppose they managed?" She looked guiltily at the door leading into the room where the children were sleeping. She had wondered why a little house so poorly put together as this one should have connecting doors between its rooms.

Will followed her glance. "I don't know but what it's a good thing them doors is there. Now I can kiss you without having you wiggle away and think the kids are lookin'."

He put his arms around her, and Cora responded with perhaps more passion than she had shown before in her whole married life. Afterwards she wondered whether it was the talk they had been having, and she wondered, too, why this should be the case.

The sun was considerably higher when the sound of snickering laughter came to them from behind the door of the children's room. Cora got out of bed hastily, and went to the door. Joe and Jeff were on their double bed, watching Barbie, who stumbled back and forth with an affected strut across the tumbled bedding on her cot. Over her shoulder she simpered in an engaging and childishly toothless fashion at her chuckling brothers. Around her neck was a long black lace stocking. Held to the flannel front of her nightgown was a huge bunch of paper violets. On her head, tilted at an abrupt angle, was Cora's sailor hat.

"Where did you get those flowers? And that stocking?" Cora was momentarily puzzled; then, as she thought of the information Will had just given her, swiftly alarmed. She hurried to the door of the small closet which she had not had time to inspect the night before. In the general clean-up which the hotel janitor had given the house before their arrival, he had evidently used the closet as a catch-all. Piled neatly therein were things which Cora knew would immediately delight a small girl—a plaid hair-ribbon, a rhinestone-studded comb, a scrap of a broken mirror, a kewpie-doll pincushion. Kicking at the pile angrily with a bare toe, Cora slammed the closet door shut, and whirled around to her children. They were innocently interested in her behavior, but not alarmed.

Joe held out a postcard to her, still laughing at his sister's antics. "She's trying to look like this, Mom."

Cora took the card as gingerly as if it had been a dead toad. The buxom curves of the beaming maiden on its glossy front made a well-clothed figure "S" across the card. Around her plump neck was a feather boa; fastened to her generous bosom was a huge bunch of violets; tilted at a steep angle on her head was a Merry Widow hat with many willow plumes sweeping from its brim. One ankle peeped daringly from

beneath a skirt which she lifted coquettishly. The simper Barbie had assumed in imitation of the smile on the face of the pictured hussy was almost too realistic to be borne by her mother.

“The idea! Take off those things this minute, and come wash your hands! Throw those awful flowers and that rag of a stocking into the coal bucket! And, Joe, you get up out of bed this minute, and get dressed. I want you to get some lye and some Dutch Cleanser and — and — well, I’ll ask your father what else you’re to get. We’ll scrub this house from top to bottom before another day has passed.”



The first breakfast was over in the new home. Emptying into the teakettle the last of the bucket of water which Will had brought in just before bedtime, she turned to him.

“Now, Will, you show me where the well is, and I’ll carry my own water after this.”

“There ain’t no well, Cora. Not in the whole town of Cottonwood. Ever’body buys their water at fifty cents a barrel. I borrowed that pailful from Labrees over there.”

Cora looked at him for a full minute, letting the fact sink in. It was so startling that there was no well any place in the whole town that at first she almost laughed at the oddity of it. But as the words seeped fully into her housekeeping and maternal consciousness, she realized that it was no laughing matter. She thought of the children’s clothes that needed to be washed, and the tubfuls which she had planned to use in scrubbing the house. She looked at him hard, hoping he was joking. As she saw he was speaking the truth, dismay deepened in her face. She mustn’t let Will see the extent of her consternation. Forcing a dismal smile, she held out the bucket to him.

“Well, borrow another pailful for me, will you? Then we’ll get three or four barrels of water to start with. How do we do that?”

“The water man comes around three times a week. He’s due to come t’ this part of town today. Rose Labree said she’d make him come here. But you’re gonna be disappointed, Cora; he only lets each family have one barrel at a time — and you only get three barrels a week — it keeps him workin’ overtime as it is t’ keep the town in water. He hauls it from the river about three miles away.”

Cora looked at Will unhappily. He patted her shoulder roughly, half-sympathetic, half-amused. “My poor little scrubber. You just gotta read a book in place a scrubbin’ all the time.”

Cora pushed out her chin. "Don't you worry about me. The rest of these people seem to have lived through it. But how they keep clean, I don't know."

When Will came back with a bucket of water, he set it down carefully on a rough table beside the stove. "We gotta remember to return this, Cora. It's about as bad as horse-stealin' not to pay back water in these parts." He laughed and shrugged. "Well, I'm off. I'll eat dinner at the beanery this noon — then you can just git the kids a bite, and won't have to bother about me."

"You'll do no such thing," Cora said briskly. "Think I came all the way out here to have you eating downtown? People'd think you had a fine wife! You can bring home some meat for dinner, and Joe and I can go down this afternoon and lay in a store of things. You can put up some shelves in the kitchen for me, and build me a bread box. I'll make biscuits today; then I'll get some yeast and bake tomorrow."

"Pancakes for breakfast?" Will wanted to know.

"Pancakes for breakfast."

Although barrels of unpacked household goods still stood in the middle of the floor and the house was in complete disorder, Cora already saw in her mind's eye a clean and spotless home where activities ran on schedule: Monday, washing; Tuesday, ironing; Wednesday, baking; Thursday, mending; Friday, cleaning; Saturday, more baking; Sunday, church and a roast for dinner. White pancakes for fall and spring; buck-wheat pancakes for winter. She smiled happily at Will.

Turning briskly to Barbie she said, "Barbie, you take Jeff out in the yard. The two of you can start carrying the little chunks of wood around to the back — I'll show you where. Joe can take the big chunks and stack it later. Joe, you can chop down sagebrush; and Barbie and Jeff can pile it at the back, and we'll burn it. We've all got to work."

"The sagebrush'll make a terrible smudge, Cora —" Will began. He broke off abruptly. "Never mind, honey," he said. "When the water man comes, you'll find a new barrel around on the shady side of the house." He picked up Jeff and carried him down the steps. "Yes, sir, my boy, we've all got t' step lively when your mother's around. She'll make great men of us yet." He smiled at Cora to show that there was no malice in his remark.



In the middle of the morning, Cora heard a team drive up to the door.

Barbie shouted from the yard, “The water man’s here! The water man’s here!”

Joe came to the door and said politely, “Here’s the water man, Mom. You’d better come talk to him. Barbie’s making an awful racket.”

Cora went outside to find a strange contraption resembling a hayrack drawn up to her door by two powerful horses. The vehicle was filled with many barrels covered with wet gunny sacks, held in place by staves. At the front of it, seated on a kitchen chair which was fastened to the frame, was a small man in neat blue overalls, with an oversize straw hat on his head. Through gold-rimmed spectacles, he peered benignly at her.

“Howdy, Mrs. Gray,” he said with great dignity. “I’m the water man. Rose Labree said you needed water, and I come right over.”

He climbed down from his chair. “You kin hold the reins,” he said to Joe, as though he were conferring a great honor on him.

Joe took them carefully and stood at rigid attention, with the reins clenched tightly between tense fingers. Seeing Barbie’s look of disappointment, the water man said to her, “I’ll need you to hold the gunny sack off’n the bar’l.”

“Our barrel’s around here on the shady side of the house.” Cora led him around to it.

He looked it over with the eye of a connoisseur. “Good. Good. A good tight bar’l that’ll last you fer many a day. But it oughta be sunk in the ground, Mrs. Gray. Yes, it really oughta. It’ll stay cooler in summer that way, and be handier t’ git at any time. I never could git these other folks that lived here to berry their water, but you git Mr. Gray t’ sink this bar’l jist as soon as it gits empty.”

“But the children might fall in,” Cora objected.

He began deliberately to fill the barrel from one on the wagon, a bucketful at a time. “No, you kiver it with a tub. An’ the children mustn’t never go near the water bar’l. Not never! It’s a sin that oughta be punished by death er worse.”

He uttered these words in the most soft and gentle voice imaginable. Barbie dropped the wet gunny sack she was holding and backed slowly away from the barrel, looking at it with horror.

Cora saw he wasn’t joking. “Is there no way I can get more than a barrel at a time, Mr. _____?” she asked.

“My name is of no importance, Mrs. Gray,” he said rather pompously. “What I bring you is the important thing. I am the water man.”

After giving Cora a moment to absorb this thought, he answered her question firmly. “The water man don’t know of no way you kin git

more'n a bar'l at a time, Mrs. Gray. Everybody does without all he wants so's everybody kin have. It seems awful hard at first, but you'll be glad later, becuz it'd soon run up into more money 'n you c'd afford. There ain't no family in this town oughta be so spendin' with water they have to pay more'n a dollar 'n a half a week fer it. That's whut three bar'ls come to. Now I know about whut Bill Gray makes; an' he cain't afford t' have me sell you more'n three bar'ls a week, not even if you beg fer it on bended knees."

Cora felt both irritated and apologetic. "I'm not spendthrift with water ! I simply need some immediately for a lot of washing and scrubbing I have to do."

He smiled at her soothingly. "You newcomers gotta learn, Mrs. Gray. Now what you do, Mrs. Gray — you make all the kids wash in the same water. Be fair to them. Let the little boy wash first one day, the big boy the next, the little girl the next. That way nobuddy's cheated, and all's equally clean. An' tell 'em not t' drink so much. An' use about a third as much fer cookin' an' dishwashin' as you're used to. Peel your potatoes without no water. When you wash clothes, jist wash 'em outa one tubful and rench 'em outa one more. Then you save your rench water from one week to use for your wash water the next."

He delivered all this in a rapid singsong, as though it was something he had repeated many times. Finished with his task of filling the barrel, he turned back to the wagon.

Cora said, "Just a minute; I'll get your money."

"No, Mrs. Gray. Not fer the first bar'l. It comes easier t' pay fer the second. An' life's tough enough these days even when you git the first bar'l a water free."

He took the reins from Joe and climbed back up on his seat. From this height he smiled down at Cora in a kindly fashion. "Don't let it knock yer props from under yuh, Mrs. Gray. You'll git along better'n you think fer."

He paused, then fixed the children with a mild eye, and said slowly and impressively, "An' don't never, never, never let me hear of you little Grays havin' water fights. When you wanta throw water, you go t' the river. You hear me!"

A cluck to his team, and the makeshift water wagon went lumbering off. Though his seat jiggled furiously beneath him, the little man sat very erect. About a block away he turned around and called out something.

"What?" cried Cora.

"Boil it!" shouted the water man. His voice came back on the wind.

“Boil — it!” The wagon creaked off.

“Well, I never!” Cora said with a helpless laugh to Joe. “I think we’re in a country of crazy people. But he’s right about one thing — you children stay away from that water barrel, or I’ll give you good spankings.”

“I’ll never go near it, Mama — never! He’d kill us all!” Barbie spoke with great intensity, enjoying the quivering fear which sounded in her voice.

“I guess I’d have something to say about that,” Cora said. “But just the same — and I mean it — you remember not to go near that barrel.”

Cora stood for a moment looking at the barrel. A gust of wind whipped around the corner of the house, and it seemed to her that she could see the film of dust deposited on the water. She got a washtub from the kitchen and put it over the top of the barrel.

Her eyes searched the countryside. A narrow road, with deep ruts, wound across the plain behind their house, disappearing between two small brown hills. No tree was to be seen, but in places the sagebrush grew almost as high as lilac bushes. The air was fresh and heady, drenched with the fragrance of the sage; but to Cora the country was as ugly as anything she had ever seen, and she turned to go inside without reluctance. Out here she could do little, but inside she could do much. Sagebrush could be pulled up from the yard, only to expose an expanse of brown dirt. She looked at the barrel angrily. There could be no question of flowers or grass or trees with water selling at fifty cents a barrel.

As she entered her house, she felt an excitement which was always hers when she came within her own four walls. Inside these four walls, she could control the wild shiftlessness of the West. Inside these walls she could bathe her children and scrub their ears and see that they were clothed in clean garments. Inside these walls she could bake bread and apple pie and fry chicken as she had been taught to do back home in Iowa. She hung some pans on nails sticking out from the kitchen walls, and vowed that Will should make her shelves before the week was out.



That evening Cora looked about her again, this time with a feeling of great contentment. She had taken the water man’s advice, and had used her wash water for scrubbing her floors and woodwork; but even so, she thought ruefully, the barrel of water was already more than half gone. The house now had a steamed, soapy smell about it; and depressions in the uneven floor still showed damp spots from the recent scrubbing. The

children's clothes were hung on nails in the tiny closet, or were sorted into neat piles on kitchen chairs which Cora had ranged along one side of the wall. White lace curtains, still creased from their packing, covered the shining windows. White cotton bedspreads covered the beds, even Barbie's cot; and Barbie had been cautioned that there was to be no more jumping up and down on it. A huge pile of sagebrush was stacked at one side of the yard, and at least one tiny patch of ground directly at the front of the house was completely cleared.

The mood of close identification of herself with her family was still upon Cora. When the dishes were done, she brought some darning into the circle of light cast by the oil lamp. So sharp was her perception of Will and each of the children that it seemed to her they sat within a charmed circle. Joe was hunched over the table reading a book. Barbie, who was curled up on her father's lap, put her finger on his throat now and then in an attempt to feel the rumble of his voice as he talked to her mother.

"It's time for you to go to bed, Barbie," Cora said, smiling quietly at her daughter.

"Papa used to sing to me before I went to bed," Barbie objected.

"That's right, I did," said Will. "I used to sing to you. And I'm glad t' have the chance t' be singing to you again. What'll it be?"

Barbie wrinkled her forehead in an attempt to remember the songs her father had sung to her before he went to Montana.

Joe said, "Sing that one about the old man who's going up North to freeze to death, Papa. It used to make Barbie cry, but it's pretty; and she's got to grow up some time and quit crying."

Will gathered Barbie more closely to him. She watched his mouth and throat intently as he started to sing.

I'm goin' from the cotton fields,
 I'm goin' from the cane,
 I'm goin' t' leave the old log hut
 That stands down in the lane.
 When the sun goes down tonight —
 Oh, it makes me sigh —
 When the sun goes down tonight,
 I'm goin' t' say goodbye.

Will's voice, singing the plaintive, sentimental white man's version of the Negro's thoughts, rose full and rich in the quiet autumn air. A patch of moonlight, brighter than the glow from the oil lamp, shone on the floor. The evening was chilly, and no fire was built. Somewhere in the distance

Cora heard with great clearness the hoofs of a plodding horse and the turning wheels of a wagon. She looked about her at these people she loved most of all those on earth, and felt a lonesome peace in accepting as home this strange land in which she found herself. She could almost feel the miles and miles of silent prairie stretching out away from her, and she could hear the wind, rushing through space, with never a treetop to stop its breathless speed. She pulled her rolled-up sleeves down over her cold arms.

Now Dinah she don't want t' go,
 She says she's gettin' old,
 An' she's afeard she'll freeze t' death,
 That country am so cold.

A long, shuddering sob from Barbie interrupted the song. "Oh, Papa, I can't stand it. Truly I can't. It's too sad."

"No, Barbie, you gotta hear it all. You can't just say you can't stand things and not listen when a body wants t' sing a song. You let me finish, and then I'll sing a funny one for you."

Barbie put her hand over her mouth, and cowered down against her father's chest. He stroked her hair gently as he finished the song for Joe, and wiped the tears from his own eyes when he had finished. Then he picked Barbie up in his arms and started waltzing gaily about the floor with her as he began to sing his next song:

Now McManus loaned a dress suit
 For the ball the other night.
 The coat was much too large for him,
 The pants they was too tight —

The Color of America

BY CAREY McWILLIAMS

Volume 2, Number 4 Winter 1942

Carey McWilliams, the distinguished author of *Factories in the Field*, also had essays in the winter 1941 and spring 1942 issues. He died in 1980.

In mapping out a program of social action on race problems the first consideration to be recognized is that, as Max Lerner has said, "the conditions under which a negative state was able to function no longer apply. They have been destroyed by a world revolution. And yet the same revolution gives us the tools for *an affirmative state*." We should not fear the exercise of the power of the state for democratic objectives. The mere fact, for example, that government has not acted in a particular field, does not constitute a reason why it should not act now, if the necessity is apparent. It is also necessary to recognize that, while we have moved far away from laissez-faire doctrines in economics, we still anachronistically pursue laissez-faire theories in population matters. At the outset of democratic development, it was perhaps sufficient merely to define human rights. In a world of open resources and expanding industrial opportunities, it was sufficient to define the right and to remove the shackle. But in this kind of world it becomes imperative that the right be implemented and that the vague declaration be enforced.

Our first assignment, therefore, is to establish the principle that, *as a matter of national policy*, there shall be no discrimination against individuals because of race, color, creed, or country of national origin. Such a statement seems innocuous; but it is the crux of the matter. For once such a national policy has been proclaimed (and we have already attempted to do so), then it can be implemented in a limitless variety of

ways. It can be made applicable to every concern from which the government purchases so much as a single lead pencil. To implement such a policy is merely to enforce the declarations in the Constitution. In making grants and subsidies to states and local communities, such a declaration of policy can be written into every grant as a condition to the appropriation (a precedent established in the second Morrill Act of 1890). If we adopt a national policy against discrimination, it can be implemented by appropriate directives to every national planning agency. It can be carried into effect, for example, in planning postwar urban redevelopment programs. Governments today license a vast number of enterprises which, by their nature, are invested with a public interest. Into each and every permit issued, a condition of non-discrimination can be written. In default of compliance, the license can be revoked. In fact, such a policy, if it is firmly and conclusively established, can be implemented in an endless variety of ways which do not involve direct compulsion.

To assist in the development of such a policy, a congressional committee of inquiry should be created to investigate the whole problem of colored minorities in the United States. The scope of the inquiry should be broad and all-inclusive; it should not be limited to any one group nor to any particular area. It should embrace conditions in our outlying territories and possessions as well as on the mainland. Nor should the committee be limited in its objectives: it should look at the world situation as well as the national scene. It should, for example, visit South America and observe, at first hand, how Brazil treats its Negroes. Committees of inquiry are invaluable devices for the development of two types of opinions: congressional opinion and general lay opinion. The report of a congressional committee goes directly to Congress. It focuses the attention of Congress and of the nation upon a particular subject. It cannot be ignored as easily, for example, as the report of a lay organization or, for that matter, of a government agency. The hearings of such committees, by dramatizing situations, are priceless opinion-developers: they are news. That Congress had moved in this direction would do much to demonstrate immediately to the world, and to minorities throughout the world, that America had acted. Out of such hearings would come, I am convinced, a series of concrete recommendations.

These recommendations are based upon a recognition of the inadequacy of existing legislation. What additional legislation, then, should be called for?

Enforce the Bill of Rights

The first step which Congress should take is to enforce—to implement—the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. This action should take the form of reenacting a new federal civil rights statute. To be sure, the court held the original act unconstitutional; but precedents have been reversed and, in view of the way in which the court has changed its own theory of the fourteenth amendment, it is altogether likely that such an act would be upheld today. The necessity for the immediate adoption of such a statute may be quickly demonstrated.

In the first place, we need such a federal statute to protect the rights of racial and national minorities in this country. Unless we want to make it possible for a single state to determine the international policy of this country, then such a statute is imperative.

In the second place, only eighteen states have adopted civil rights statutes. Since a majority of the states have failed to provide adequate enforcement of civil rights, the federal government should act.

In the third place, the nation has, through the progress of civilization, become a single unit in a sense that was certainly not true in 1876, when the Reconstruction program was abandoned. Not only do citizens of the United States travel more frequently (at least prior to the war), but they travel greater distances. In order to travel in the United States today, American Negroes annually purchase 15,000 copies of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* so that they may know where they can get a room in which to sleep, where they can find a restaurant to get a meal, and where they can find a barber shop in which to get a haircut. The only way to cope with this situation is by federal legislation. Furthermore, Congress should outlaw Jim Crowism on all types of interstate carriers. The past failure of Congress to act in this respect has actually encouraged the states to adopt Jim Crow regulations, which constitute an unwarranted burden on interstate commerce.

To appreciate the necessity for federal legislation, it should be kept in mind that local Jim Crow regulations have been constantly increasing—not decreasing—in severity. In Virginia, for example, a Negro was formerly defined as a person who had one-fourth or more Negro blood. In 1910 this definition was changed to one-sixteenth and in 1930 it was changed to apply to any person in whom there is *any ascertainable quantum* of Negro blood. Coupled with this new definition, Virginia also passed in 1930 a race registration act. Most other southern states have followed the same trend.

With Jim Crow regulations multiplying in the South year after year, it has become perfectly apparent that the whole bi-racial system is falling apart, and that the entire system has become unworkable and unenforceable. In Arkansas, for example, “a person in whom there is a visible and distinct admixture of African blood” cannot ride in the white section of a bus. But with so many cases of mixed blood, how in the name of all that is sane and sensible can a conductor apply this test in practice? That many persons of non-Negroid blood are frequently caught in these absurd regulations is clearly indicated by the increasing number of libel and slander actions that have been successfully prosecuted in southern courts. As the percentage of persons of pure Negro extraction decreases (as it is doing), the classification upon which Jim Crow statutes are based becomes increasingly unreasonable. I am convinced that many statutes are, for this reason alone, clearly unconstitutional. A Louisiana appellate court recently held invalid a marriage between a white man and a woman whose great-great-grandmother was a Negress. How can such a classification be upheld as reasonable? A few years ago a woman in Arizona, who was part Negro and part white, challenged the constitutionality of a miscegenation statute on the ground that, the way it was worded, she could not contract a legal marriage with either a Negro or a white man. With understandable vehemence, she contended that the restriction was slightly unreasonable.

In most southern states today the races are separated by legislative enactment, in telephone directories; in places of employment; in schools. Statutes provide for separate toilets; separate pool halls; separate busses and bus drivers; separate teachers and separate schools; separate playgrounds and separate libraries; and separate hospitals, asylums, reformatories, prisons, and orphanages. Even separate Bibles are provided in court, for each race must swear to the same God on a separate copy of the identical text. In the South, the races cannot play pool together, or box with each other, or wrestle with each other. Railroads have been held liable in damages because a conductor, in making the call for dinner, inadvertently called a white person at a time when Negroes were about to be served. Railroads must provide separate waiting rooms, separate toilets in waiting rooms, separate accommodations on trains, and even, if you please, *separate boxes* on which passengers step in entering trains; likewise, separate entrances and exits must be provided. The expense occasioned by these regulations clearly constitutes a tax on the entire traveling public in the form of increased passenger rates. In Florida, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Tennessee it is a crime for anyone to allow stu-

dents of the two races to commingle even in a private institution; and the teachers themselves are liable. In Kentucky, if free school books have been used by one race, they cannot thereafter be used by the other. In Louisiana, apartment-house owners cannot rent an apartment to a person of a different race from the existing occupants. Furthermore, separate means completely separate. A school building divided into two sections is not sufficient; the buildings must be wholly separate in space.

It should also be noted that these statutes not only make the provision of separate facilities mandatory, but they make all persons punishable who, in any way, have failed to observe the prohibition. Thus in Florida it is a criminal offense for a member of one race to instruct the children of the other. In some cases, ministers are prohibited from performing a marriage ceremony for persons of another race. In all of these situations, the proprietor and the patron are punishable for nonobservance of the ritual. For example, if I were to enter a Negro pool hall and attempt to play pool, I could be prosecuted even if I were there because I wanted to play pool with Negroes. These same statutes apply, in most cases, to *all* colored people. In Mississippi the Supreme Court held that a young Chinese girl could not attend a white school and the decision was upheld by the United States Supreme Court.

To end this despotism of bigotry, an all-inclusive federal civil rights statute should be adopted. It should, moreover, be termed, not a civil rights statute, but a fair racial practice act. In method and procedure, it should follow the pattern of the National Labor Relations Act; and its enforcement should be delegated to a similar administrative agency. The difficulty with most civil rights statutes is that their enforcement is left up to the individual. Most of the state statutes provide that the individual aggrieved may bring action in the state courts for the recovery of a penalty. The recovery of the penalty may assuage the feelings of the injured party, but it does not prevent the unfair racial practice. All too frequently, the injured party lacks the funds, or the spirit, to bring the action. The statute which I propose should provide for administrative enforcement as a matter of public policy, rather than for individual enforcement as a matter of personal privilege. The individual may not feel injured by the discrimination; but society may well feel that its stability is being undermined by the practice.

One illustration will serve to demonstrate the point. Joe Doakes runs a lunch counter. Joe is a good guy; he has no race prejudice whatever. Personally he has no objection to serving Negroes, or Indians, or Chinese; as a matter of fact, he wants their patronage. But perhaps his white

customers object. By refusing to patronize Joe, they can force him to deny service to colored people. Also Joe may have a competitor down the street who denies service to Negroes: to meet this competition Joe may be forced to operate an “All-White” restaurant. Society should protect the decent impulses of Joe Doakes and discourage the prejudices of his white customers. It should throw its protection around him, in the form of a fair racial practice act, which would permit him to do what he probably would like to do, namely serve all alike without discrimination.

Similarly if I want to associate with Negroes, or Chinese, or Japanese, or Filipinos, I should not have to do so in a furtive and clandestine manner. If I want to take a Negro to lunch, I should be at liberty to do so without fear of embarrassment to my guest. A fair racial practice act would, therefore, enlarge my rights while protecting those of the Negro. In the absence of such a code, society penalizes the decent impulses of its citizens and makes the expression of liberal attitudes unnecessarily difficult and complex. Society should not only establish the policy of no discrimination: it should enforce the practice.

By the issuance of cease-and-desist orders, after the pattern of the Wagner Act, these unfair racial practices can be largely eliminated. To be sure there would be opposition (there was violent opposition to the Wagner Act); and doubtless it would take a long time to secure compliance. But that compliance can be obtained through the use of these methods, I am firmly convinced. I know employers who hated union organizers more than they dislike Negroes. Thanks to the work of the National Labor Relations Board, however, the principle of collective bargaining is firmly established today. This does not mean that anti-union prejudice has been eliminated; but its expression, in certain forms, has been checked. An unfair racial practice act would not eliminate race prejudice, but it would check discrimination.

What I am suggesting is not, perhaps, as novel as it may seem. In an awkward and clumsy manner, we have already moved in this direction. The creation of a Civil Liberties Unit within the Department of Justice is in itself a recognition for specialized skills in the enforcement of civil rights. The Civil Liberties Unit, however, is not an administrative agency, and it is the administrative approach that is most effective. If the enforcement of the Wagner Act had been entrusted to local United States district attorneys, it would have remained a dead letter. One of the objections to state civil rights statutes, in fact, is that they must be enforced by actions in state courts.

There is clear constitutional warrant for such legislation. It could be

justified both under the fourteenth amendment and under the interstate commerce clause. That unfair racial practices clearly constitute a burden on interstate commerce is a proposition which could be readily documented. Negroes have organized effective boycotts of stores which do not employ Negro labor. They have conducted strikes to implement the declared boycott, and their right to do so has been upheld by the Supreme Court. Such strikes can have precisely the same effect on interstate commerce as a strike called in a labor dispute. Given the present interpretation of the commerce clause, a wide segment of American life could be embraced by an unfair racial practice act. Besides, in my opinion, the power of Congress to enforce civil rights by appropriate legislation is clearly authorized by the fourteenth amendment.

Additional Measures

To be effective federal intervention must take place on several different levels. One of the most serious handicaps which colored minorities face today is that of residential segregation. Segregation by ordinance has been held unconstitutional; but segregation by restrictive clauses in grant deeds has been upheld. Construed as restraints on use and occupation rather than as restraints upon alienation, these clauses do not offend against the existing laws of real property. In a recent decision, the Supreme Court refused to pass on the question of whether or not such clauses violate the fourteenth amendment.

Eighty percent of the city of Chicago is covered by restrictive clauses of this character. While the clauses tend to break down as Negroes infiltrate into marginal areas, nevertheless the area of expansion is carefully restricted. The existence of such natural barriers as parks, rivers, and railroad embankments serves to buttress the policy of restriction. Within the black ghetto, buildings deteriorate and fall down and it becomes cheaper to remove them (and save taxes) than to repair them. Ninety-five percent of the buildings tenanted by Negroes in Chicago are absentee-owned. "Absentee owners," it has been noted, "have no incentive to rebuild and rehabilitate as long as the demand exceeds the supply, indeed they have an incentive to keep the demand in excess of supply." The city government, moreover, is reluctant to secure compliance with existing health and building ordinances lest property owners tear down their buildings, thereby depriving the city of improved property taxes. This is an almost universal pattern and, by its nature, it tends to be self-perpetuating. By refusing loans to Negroes who desire to purchase

houses, except in areas where Negroes constitute more than 50 percent of the residents, the F.H.A. merely assists in perpetuating the existing pattern of segregation.

There are ways, however, to break such a pattern. Local planning commissions may provide, as they have in some cases, that new subdivisions will not be approved if it is proposed to restrict the use or occupation of lots on a racial basis. Urban redevelopment projects can follow a similar policy; in fact, the policy can be enforced, since most of such projects will be federally financed. Furthermore, the United States Housing Authority can be utilized to break the existing deadlock and to provide decent housing without racial segregation. Also, if necessary, local communities with federal aid can purchase or condemn land and thereby remove the obnoxious restrictions. With public housing being boomed as an essential postwar industry, the possibilities for improvement along these lines are immeasurably greater than they were a few years ago. In the exercise of its war-time powers, the federal government can unquestionably disregard these restrictive clauses or even suspend their enforcement for the duration if it so desires. War-time rent-control measures can be used in a similar fashion.

Congress should also outlaw the poll tax in federal elections. The states themselves cannot be expected to take the initiative, since, in most cases, repeal of the tax would involve approval by state legislatures made up of legislators who have been elected by voters who have paid their poll taxes. An estimated 10,500,000 American citizens are prevented from voting by the existence of the poll tax in eight southern states. The tax disfranchises white as well as colored citizens; it makes for political corruption; and it is destructive of the democratic process. Congress also has the power to force the states not only to eliminate the poll tax in local elections, but to drop every device which southern ingenuity has invented to disfranchise the Negro. Section 2 of the fourteenth amendment clearly provides that if any state restricts the right of its citizens to vote on account of "race, color, or previous condition," its representatives in Congress shall be reduced accordingly. In June 1929 Representative Tinkham of Massachusetts attempted to enforce this section and, to the surprise of the nation, he nearly succeeded. Congress can, if necessary, supervise federal elections. The approach to the problem must be, therefore, by *affirmative congressional action*.

In June 1940 the National Defense Advisory Committee announced that henceforth there should be no discrimination in defense employment on the ground of age, sex, race, or color. A short time later, the Commis-

sion of Education announced that "in the expenditure of Federal funds for vocational training for defense there should be no discrimination." When these measures failed to stop discrimination, the Negro march on Washington was organized. Almost immediately thereafter President Roosevelt issued (25 June 1941) his famous Executive Order Number 8802. For the purpose of effectuating the previously announced policy against discrimination, the order provided: (1) that all government agencies concerned with training programs should take measures designed to prevent discrimination; (2) that all government contracting agencies should include in defense contracts a provision obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any worker because of race, color, or country of national origin; and (3) that there should be established a Committee on Fair Employment Practices to investigate complaints of discrimination and to take appropriate steps to redress valid grievances. Later the president instructed all government agencies to examine their personnel policies in an effort to eliminate Jim Crowism in government service.

The creation of the F.E.P.C. unquestionably constitutes an extremely important precedent. This committee, as Dr. Malcolm S. MacLean has said, did more in the first eighty weeks of its existence to bring the Bill of Rights closer to reality than anything accomplished in the past eighty years. Negro employment increased in shipyards from 6,952 to 12,820; in navy shipyards from 6,000 to 14,000; and in aircraft from 0 to 5,000. This improvement has been accomplished, moreover, despite the fact that the F.E.P.C. has no legislative sanction and that it has no real powers of enforcement. Despite the fact that the F.E.P.C. has "not more than opened by a crack doors formerly barred to Negro workers," it is being quietly sabotaged in Washington. What has been accomplished, however, constitutes the clearest warrant for strengthening the F.E.P.C., of providing it with effective remedies, giving it legislative sanction, and correlating its activities with some type of fair racial practice set-up such as I have proposed.

Now is also the time to reconsider our naturalization and immigration policies. Every vestige of racism should be removed from these statutes. Our present policy, which makes non-white persons other than those of African descent ineligible to citizenship, should be corrected. It has worked a serious injustice and has been productive of needless national and international complications. No racial line should be drawn in determining eligibility to citizenship. Whatever the tests of eligibility should be — and I hope they are high — they should not be predicated on racial considerations. A first step would be to make all Orientals resident

in the United States eligible for naturalization. No one act would do more, perhaps, to remove anti-American feeling in the Far East; nor would such a move jeopardize a single national interest. Similarly our immigration quotas should be corrected; here, too, all traces of racism should be removed. As Pearl Buck has said:

... Another Chinese reservation is being made on the matter of our antiquated and obsolete immigration laws The Chinese appreciate our need to limit immigration, but they would like to be put on terms of equality with other peoples and come in on a quota. The number involved would be one or two hundred Chinese each year, and the value of changing the Chinese exclusion law *now* would far outweigh, in the war effort, many tanks and planes. It would be a great move toward total victory.

The quota allowed Filipinos (fifty a year) is absurd. Not only should the Filipino quota be increased, but all nationalities should be placed on a basis of absolute equality. If we were to plan intelligently, it would be possible, for example, to bring in several thousand Filipinos a year, for training and work experience in American agriculture and industry. But immigration of this type should be placed on a selective basis and it should be handled purposefully and intelligently. In the past, the immigration service has functioned in a purely mechanical manner; in the future, its concern with immigrants should not cease once they have been admitted. In the last analysis, immigration problems constitute world problems and they must be handled by a world organization. A worldwide nationality and citizenship code, for example, is absolutely essential if the existing chaos is to be eliminated.

Towards a World Policy

One of our basic weaknesses in dealing with colored minorities has been our failure to recognize the basic similarity of problems which they present. We have never recognized, for example, a correlation between Indians and Negroes. Had we determined to make slaves of the Indians, it is altogether probable that we would have as many Indians today as we have American Negroes. But we decided to use Indians for other purposes; they could be used, for example, very conveniently to police Negro slaves. William Christie MacLeod quotes one colonial writer to the effect that

in our quarrels with the Indians, however proper and necessary it may be to give them correction, it can never be to our interest to extirpate them or to force them from their lands; their ground would soon be taken by runaway Negroes from our settlements, whose numbers daily increase, and quickly become more formidable enemies than the

Indians can ever be, as they speak our language and would never be at loss for intelligence.

Similar points of correlation may be noted throughout our history. The year 1876 seems to have marked a turning point in our dealings with all colored minorities, for about that time we decided to exclude the Chinese, place the Indians on reservations, and surrender the Negro to the South.

"The task of arousing interest in Indian affairs," writes Loring Benson Priest,

would have been considerably easier if the Negro and Indian problems had been connected in the public mind. While the former slaves were generally better qualified to share responsibilities with other Americans, both races faced the problem of adjusting themselves to white society. A common effort to prepare both minority elements for the obligations of civilized life might well have been undertaken. When Congress conferred citizenship on the Negroes in 1866, however, any mention of the Indians was omitted. The campaign for Indian advancement had to be conducted as if nothing had been accomplished for the Negro.

It has only been of recent years that, as Dr. Ralph Linton has observed, "an interest has developed in the general phenomena which result when groups of different cultures are brought together."

Each of these contact situations has something in common with every other. The second generation problem — so striking in the case of the Chinese, Japanese, and Mexicans — is closely related to the problems of Negro youth. There is much to be gained, therefore, in attempting to correlate these various problems.

If the research on these various groups were to be systematically correlated it might throw much light on matters of even larger moment. Dr. Julian Herman Lewis has pointed out that it has only been of recent years that scientists have become curious about the specialized medical and biologic problems of the Negro. Only within comparatively recent years has the study of tuberculosis among Negroes been turned to scientific advantage by using the study of the disease among Negroes "as an approach to the understanding of some of the pertinent problems of the science." Tuberculosis among Negroes has "demonstrable differences and characteristics." While these differences are probably explained in terms of a different environment, the point is that the disease assumes different manifestations among Negroes and that specialized study of these differences may throw light on the nature of the disease itself. Tuberculosis is actually a "different disease in colored people." Negroes offer an excellent field for research into the disease since their living con-

ditions are so variable. "In no other peoples," he writes, "is it possible to compare simultaneously such a wide diversity of factors," and such studies make possible the "evaluation of factors that may influence disease." Other instances might readily be cited to establish the point that highly specialized studies of particular groups afford an insight into general problems. Some of the remarkable medical research recently undertaken in the Indian service might, for example, also be cited on this score.

Even in the social sciences and the fields of public administration important gains have been effected through a specialized approach to the problems of particular groups. The National Youth Administration at one time established a Negro Department staffed for the most part by Negroes, and, of all the relief agencies, it came "the nearest to meeting adequately the relief situation among Negro youth." Stimulated largely by the example of Mr. Harold Ickes, most New Deal agencies came to employ special advisers on Negro affairs. Mr. W. M. Kiplinger has demonstrated how rapidly the tendency has developed. He lists twenty-two agencies as now having Negro advisers on Negro affairs. In a few cases, individuals have been designated in these agencies to serve as advisers on "race relations" or in respect to "minority groups"; but, in the majority of cases, they are merely consultants on Negro affairs.

In fact, early in 1942 a proposal was made to establish a Negro Affairs Bureau. The proposal aroused instant opposition from the N.A.A.C.P. on the ground that it would "make the Negroes mere wards of the government." While some of these advisers may have been added for purely political purposes (as a form of Negro patronage) or for the purpose of being able to use a Negro in dealing with Negroes (a public relations device), nevertheless most observers agree that Negroes have profited from the establishment of such special services. Some of the best studies of the Negro problem have come about as a result of these special divisions. On the other hand, it should be noted that much of this excellent research has had only the most tenuous relation to the work of the particular agency in which it originated, as, for example, an admirable study of Negro employment during the depression which issued from the Department of Interior. It would also seem that such special advisory services have been limited almost exclusively to Negroes. I know of no such service for Mexicans or Spanish-Americans, although the need is obvious.

While I would not be in favor of creating a Bureau of Negro Affairs *per se*, I can see some definite advantages to be gained by the establish-

ment of an agency in the federal government directly concerned with minority problems. There is today, as Mr. T. J. Woofter, Jr. has observed, "substantial agreement as to what needs to be done for leadership, for health, for education, for law and order, for economic advancement, for social welfare." While he was speaking of Negroes, the same observation can be made of the other colored minorities. But how is special research to be undertaken and coordinated and how are action programs to be formulated, unless such activities find a direct focus at some point in the apparatus of government?

If an agency of the federal government were merely invested with the full power of investigation, including the right to issue subpoenas and to hold public hearings and to report the facts, I think the public—including the Negroes—might be astonished at the results. For four years I had the privilege of directing the work of the Division of Immigration and Housing in the State of California. Created in 1913 to deal with the immigrant problem, this agency has merely the powers I have mentioned. Yet I have had occasion to be truly amazed by what can be accomplished merely by making the facts of a particular situation *officially known*. What the Federal Council of Churches and the Rosenwald Foundation have to say about race relations is, after all, merely the opinion of two private unofficial organizations. What would be the effect, however, if an agency such as I have mentioned, were to report each year in detail on lynchings in the United States? As the report of an official agency, such a report would reach every senator and every congressman; it would reach every public agency in the government; it could be effectively used by every individual and organization of good will in America in developing an intelligent public opinion; and, lastly, it would present to the president a set of facts which, coming from an official agency, he could hardly ignore. I mention lynchings, but such an annual report would also deal with social conditions, with education, with public health, with the extent to which Negroes are disfranchised, and many related matters. It would be a consistent method of keeping these problems under constant federal scrutiny and of thereby forcing them upon the public's attention. The reports of such an agency would be invaluable for a variety of purposes. For example, in testing the validity of restrictive racial clauses in grant deeds, no individual litigant, regardless of his resources, could possibly finance, much less obtain, the type of documentary evidence which should be summarized in a sociological brief to be presented along with the legal arguments to the Supreme Court.

Such an agency, however, should have broader powers than those indicated. It should be authorized to initiate, or at least to recommend the initiation of, specific action programs. The maternal death rate among Negroes is three times that among whites. Only 7.4 percent of the native whites have had less than five years of schooling; but 41.3 percent of the Negroes have had less than five years in school. The Negro death rate is 32 percent higher than that of the rest of the population, the Negro's life expectancy is eleven years less than that of his white neighbor, and his toll of daily sickness is 43 percent greater than for white Americans. Negro tuberculosis is 2.6 times that of whites in the South and 5.3 times that of whites in the North. The mortality rate from tuberculosis among Negroes is, on an average, from three to four times as high as for the white population. Theoretically there should be one hospital bed for every death from tuberculosis. But in 1934, with 21,099 Negro deaths from tuberculosis, there were only 3,334 beds for colored tubercular patients. In 1935 it was estimated that some 7,138,455 Negroes, or 83 percent of those in twelve southern states, did not have access to a public library. Similar statistics might be endlessly multiplied and also correlated with similar figures about Indians and Mexicans.

Not one of these problems is insoluble. If the federal government, recognizing the special disabilities of American Indians, can provide them with schools, hospitals, medical service, and library facilities, it can certainly do so for the other groups similarly disadvantaged. If the southern states are financially unable to provide adequate institutional services for Negroes, then the federal government can offer subsidies or grants-in-aid for this purpose. But these grants should be offered with a provision attached that there should be absolutely no discrimination. If the southern states refuse the grants under this condition, then the federal government should go ahead and provide the services for the Negroes. Why not detach the Indian Service from the Department of Interior and consolidate it, along with the War Relocation Authority created to handle the Japanese evacuation program, in a larger agency of the type I have mentioned? If it be charged that such a suggestion is iniquitous paternalism, then create temporary authorities to accomplish particular objectives. If it be charged by Mr. Joe Starnes that this is tantamount to "spotlighting" certain situations, then let it be freely admitted that these same situations need spotlighting. If it be charged that such a proposal is undemocratic in that it is based upon a recognition of differences in social and economic condition, then I want to raise one question: have

these differences been eliminated by the pretense that they do not exist? Would this objection be valid if the other measures that I have proposed were also adopted?

The problem of colored minorities in the United States is merely a reproduction on a miniature scale of a set of similar problems which will be faced by whatever federation of powers or international organization emerges from this war. Our Indian problem has its parallel throughout Central and South America. Our Negro problem has its parallel in the West Indies, in Central America, in Africa. Our small-scale problem with the natives of American Samoa and Guam has its stupendous counterpart in the whole problem of native peoples throughout the Pacific area. These problems are not "solved" merely by the declaration that "imperialism" must be banished from the postwar world. The problem of adjustment, of acculturation, of cultural conflict remains. By taking the initiative here, we might be in a position to assert real world leadership in relation to these same problems after the war. On the other hand, by continuing an ostrich-like do-nothing policy at home, we are certainly inviting another Versailles.



Some years ago, it was my good fortune to meet Byron Darnton of the *New York Times*. We spent some time together traveling through the San Joaquin Valley in California where I was endeavoring to show him, at first hand, something about the migrant problem. A few weeks ago, he was killed in an accident on the New Guinea front and was buried in the military cemetery at Port Moresby. He is in good company there, writes a colleague, for he was buried along with another American, a Negro soldier, an Australian sailor, and a native of the Papuan Infantry. That this would have pleased Darnton, Robert Sherrod of *Time* is certain, for "he had the firm conviction that all men would one day be brothers, or they would be slaves." This is the lesson which America must learn, for it is not only the color of America that has changed: the color of the world has changed.

Richard Wright's Blues

BY RALPH ELLISON

Volume 5, Number 2 Summer 1945

Ralph Ellison has been published widely. He is professor emeritus at New York University and, of course, author of *The Invisible Man*.

If anybody ask you
who sing this song,
Say it was ole [Black] Boy
done been here and gone.

(Signature formula used by blues
singers at conclusion of song.)

As a writer, Richard Wright has outlined for himself a dual role: To discover and depict the meaning of Negro experience and to reveal to both Negroes and whites those problems of a psychological and emotional nature which arise between them when they strive for mutual understanding.

Now, in *Black Boy*, he has used his own life to probe what qualities of will, imagination, and intellect are required of a southern Negro in order to possess the meaning of his life in the United States. Wright is an important writer, perhaps the most articulate Negro American, and what he has to say is highly perceptive. Imagine Bigger Thomas projecting his own life in lucid prose, guided, say, by the insights of Marx and Freud, and you have an idea of this autobiography.

Published at a time when any sharply critical approach to Negro life has been dropped as a wartime expendable, it should do much to redefine the problem of the Negro and American democracy. Its power can be observed in the shrill manner with which some professional "friends of the Negro people" have attempted to strangle the work in a noose of newsprint.

What in the tradition of literary autobiography is it like, this work described as a "great American autobiography"? As a nonwhite intellectual's statement of his relationship to western culture, *Black Boy* recalls the conflicting pattern of identification and rejection found in Nehru's *Toward Freedom*. In its use of fictional techniques, its concern with criminality (sin) and the artistic sensibility, and in its author's judgment and rejection of the narrow world of his origin, it recalls Joyce's rejection of Dublin in *A Portrait of the Artist*. And as a psychological document of life under oppressive conditions, it recalls *The House of the Dead*, Dostoevski's profound study of the humanity of Russian criminals. Such works were perhaps Wright's literary guides, aiding him to endow his life's incidents with communicable significance; providing him with ways of seeing, feeling, and describing his environment. These influences, however, were encountered only after these first years of Wright's life were past and were not part of the immediate folk culture into which he was born. In that culture the specific folk-art form which helped shape the writer's attitude towards his life and which embodied the impulse that contributes much to the quality and tone of his autobiography was the Negro blues. This would bear a word of explanation:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy, but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically. And certainly Wright's early childhood was crammed with catastrophic incidents. In a few short years his father deserted his mother, he knew intense hunger, he became a drunkard begging drinks from black stevedores in Memphis saloons; he had to flee Arkansas where an uncle was lynched; he was forced to live with a fanatically religious grandmother in an atmosphere of constant bickering; he was lodged in an orphan asylum; he observed the suffering of his mother who became a permanent invalid, while fighting off the blows of the poverty-stricken relatives with whom he had to live; he was cheated, beaten, and kicked off jobs by white employees who disliked his eagerness to learn a trade;

and to these objective circumstances must be added the subjective fact that Wright, with his sensitivity, extreme shyness, and intelligence was a problem child who rejected his family and was by them rejected.

Thus along with the themes, equivalent descriptions of milieu, and the perspectives to be found in Joyce, Nehru, Dostoevski, George Moore, and Rousseau, *Black Boy* is filled with blues-tempered echoes of railroad trains, the names of southern towns and cities, estrangements, fights and flights, deaths and disappointments, charged with physical and spiritual hungers and pain. And like a blues sung by such an artist as Bessie Smith, its lyrical prose evokes the paradoxical, almost surreal image of a black boy singing lustily as he probes his own grievous wound.

In *Black Boy*, two worlds have fused, two cultures merged, two impulses of western man become coalesced. By discussing some of its cultural sources I hope to answer those critics who would make of the book a miracle and of its author a mystery. And while making no attempt to probe the mystery of the artist (who Hemingway says is “forged in injustice as a sword is forged”) I do hold that basically the prerequisites to the writing of *Black Boy* were, on the one hand, the microscopic degree of cultural freedom which Wright found in the South’s stony injustice and, on the other, the existence of a personality agitated to a state of almost manic restlessness. There were, of course, other factors, chiefly ideological; but these came later.

Wright speaks of his journey north as “taking a part of the South to transplant in alien soil, to see if it could grow differently, if it could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strange winds, respond to the warmth of other suns, and perhaps, to bloom . . . ” And just as Wright, the man, represents the blooming of the delinquent child of the autobiography, just so does *Black Boy* represent the flowering — cross-fertilized by pollen blown by the winds of strange cultures — of the humble blues lyric. There is, as in all acts of creation, a world of mystery in this, but there is also enough that is comprehensible for Americans to create the social atmosphere in which other black boys might freely bloom.

For certainly, in the historical sense, Wright is no exception. Born on a Mississippi plantation, he was subjected to all those blasting pressures which, in a scant eighty years, have sent the Negro people hurtling, without clearly defined trajectory, from slavery to emancipation, from log cabin to city tenement, from the white folks’ fields and kitchens to factory assembly lines; and which, between two wars, have shattered the wholeness of its folk consciousness into a thousand writhing pieces.

Black Boy describes this process in the personal terms of *one* Negro childhood. Nevertheless, several critics have complained that it does not “explain” Richard Wright. Which, aside from the notion of art involved, serves to remind us that the prevailing mood of American criticism has so thoroughly excluded the Negro that it fails to recognize some of the most basic tenets of western democratic thought when encountering them in a black skin. They forget that human life possesses an innate dignity and mankind an innate sense of nobility; that all men possess the tendency to dream and the compulsion to make their dreams reality; that the need to be ever dissatisfied and the urge ever to seek satisfaction is implicit in the human organism; and that all men are the victims and the beneficiaries of the goading, tormenting, commanding, and informing activity of that process known as the Mind — the Mind, as Valéry describes it, “armed with its inexhaustible questions.”

Perhaps all this (in which lies the very essence of the human, and which Wright takes for granted) has been forgotten because the critics recognize neither Negro humanity nor the full extent to which the southern community renders the fulfillment of human destiny impossible. And while it is true that *Black Boy* presents an almost unrelieved picture of a personality corrupted by brutal environment, it also presents those fresh human responses brought to its world by the sensitive child:

There was the *wonder* I felt when I first saw a brace of mountainlike, spotted, black-and-white horses clopping down a dusty road . . . the *delight* I caught in seeing long straight rows of red and green vegetables stretching away in the sun . . . the faint, cool kiss of *sensuality* when dew came on to my cheeks . . . the vague *sense of the infinite* as I looked down upon the yellow, dreaming waters of the Mississippi . . . the echoes of *nostalgia* I heard in the crying strings of wild geese . . . the *love* I had for the mute regality of tall, moss-clad oaks . . . the hint of *cosmic cruelty* that I *felt* when I saw the curved timbers of a wooden shack that had been warped in the summer sun . . . and there was the *quiet terror* that suffused my senses when vast hazes of gold washed earthward from star-heavy skies on silent nights . . . [*italics mine*].

And a bit later, his reactions to religion:

Many of the religious symbols appealed to my sensibilities and I responded to the dramatic vision of life held by the church, feeling that to live day by day with death as one's sole thought was to be so compassionately sensitive toward all life as to view all men as slowly dying, and the trembling sense of fate that welled up, sweet and melancholy, from the hymns blended with the sense of fate that I had already caught from life.

There was also the influence of his mother — so closely linked to his hysteria and sense of suffering — who (though he only implies it here) taught him, in the words of the dedication prefacing *Native Son*, “to

revere the fanciful and the imaginative.” There were also those white men — the one who allowed Wright to use his library privileges and the other who advised him to leave the South, and still others whose offers of friendship he was too frightened to accept.

Wright assumed that the nucleus of plastic sensibility is a human heritage — the right and the opportunity to dilate, deepen, and enrich sensibility — democracy. Thus the drama of *Black Boy* lies in its depiction of what occurs when Negro sensibility attempts to fulfill itself in the undemocratic South. Here it is not the individual that is the immediate focus, as in Joyce’s *Stephen Hero*, but that upon which his sensibility was nourished.

Those critics who complain that Wright has omitted the development of his own sensibility hold that the work thus fails as art. Others, because it presents too little of what they consider attractive in Negro life, charge that it distorts reality. Both groups miss a very obvious point: that whatever else the environment contained, it had as little chance of prevailing against the overwhelming weight of the child’s unpleasant experiences as Beethoven’s Quartets would have of destroying the stench of a Nazi prison.

We come, then, to the question of art. The function, the psychology, of artistic selectivity is to eliminate from art form all those elements of experience which contain no compelling significance. Life is as the sea, art a ship in which man conquers life’s crushing formlessness, reducing it to a course, a series of swells, tides, and wind currents inscribed on a chart. Though drawn from the world, “the organized significance of art,” writes Malraux, “is stronger than all the multiplicity of the world; . . . that significance alone enables man to conquer chaos and to master destiny.”

Wright saw his destiny — that combination of forces before which man feels powerless — in terms of a quick and casual violence inflicted upon him by both family and community. His response was likewise violent, and it has been his need to give that violence significance which has shaped his writings.

II

What were the ways by which other Negroes confronted their destiny?

In the South of Wright’s childhood there were three general ways: They could accept the role created for them by the whites and perpetually resolve the resulting conflicts through the hope and emotional

catharsis of Negro religion; they could repress their dislike of Jim Crow social relations while striving for a middle way of respectability, becoming — consciously or unconsciously — the accomplices of the whites in oppressing their brothers; or they could reject the situation, adopt a criminal attitude, and carry on an unceasing psychological scrimmage with the whites, which often flared forth into physical violence.

Wright's attitude was nearest the last. Yet, in it there was an all-important qualitative difference: it represented a groping for individual values, in a black community whose values were what the young Negro critic, Edward Bland, has defined as "pre-individual." And herein lay the setting for the extreme conflict set off, both within his family and in the community, by Wright's assertion of individuality. The clash was sharpest on the psychological level, for, to quote Bland:

In the pre-individualistic thinking of the Negro the stress is on the group. Instead of seeing in terms of the individual, the Negro sees in terms of "races," masses of peoples separated from other masses according to color. Hence, an act rarely bears intent against him as a Negro individual. He is singled out not as a person but as a specimen of an ostracized group. He knows that he never exists in his own right but only to the extent that others hope to make the race suffer vicariously through him.

This pre-individual state is induced artificially — like the regression to primitive states noted among cultured inmates of Nazi prisons. The primary technique in its enforcement is to impress the Negro child with the omniscience and omnipotence of the whites to the point that whites appear as a human as Jehovah, and as relentless as a Mississippi flood. Socially it is effected through an elaborate scheme of taboos supported by a ruthless physical violence, which strikes not only the offender, but the entire black community. To wander from the paths of behavior laid down for the group is to become the agent of communal disaster.

In such a society the development of individuality depends upon a series of accidents; which often arise, as in Wright's case, from conditions within the Negro family. In Wright's life there was the accident that as a small child he could not distinguish between his fair-skinned grandmother and the white women of the town, thus developing skepticism as to their special status. To this was linked the accident of his having no close contacts with whites until after the child's normal formative period.

But these objective accidents not only link forward to those qualities of rebellion, criminality, and intellectual questioning expressed in Wright's work today. They also link backward into the shadow of infancy where environment and consciousness are so darkly intertwined as to

require the skill of a psychoanalyst to define their point of juncture. Nevertheless, at the age of four, Wright set the house afire and was beaten near to death by his frightened mother. This beating, followed soon by his father's desertion of the family, seems to be the initial psychological motivation of his quest for a new identification. While delirious from this beating Wright was haunted "by huge wobbly white bags like the full udders of a cow, suspended from the ceiling above me [and] I was gripped by the fear that they were going to fall and drench me with some horrible liquid"

It was as though the mother's milk had turned acid, and with it the whole pattern of life that had produced the ignorance, cruelty, and fear that had fused with mother-love and exploded in the beating. It is significant that the bags were of the hostile color white, and the female symbol that of the cow, the most stupid (and, to the small child, the most frightening) of domestic animals. Here in dream symbolism is expressed an attitude worthy of an Orestes. And the significance of the crisis is increased by virtue of the historical fact that the lower-class Negro family is matriarchal; the child turns not to the father to compensate if he feels mother-rejection, but to the grandmother, or to an aunt — and Wright rejected both of these. Such rejection leaves the child open to psychological insecurity, distrust, and all of those hostile environmental forces from which the family functions to protect it.

One of the southern Negro family's methods of protecting the child is the severe beating — a homeopathic dose of the violence generated by black and white relationships. Such beatings as Wright's were administered for the child's own good; a good which the child resisted, thus giving family relationships an undercurrent of fear and hostility, which differs qualitatively from that found in patriarchal middle-class families, because here the severe beating is administered by the mother, leaving the child no parental sanctuary. He must ever embrace violence along with maternal tenderness, or else reject, in his helpless way, the mother.

The division between the Negro parents of Wright's mother's generation, whose sensibilities were often bound by their proximity to the slave experience, and their children, who historically and through the rapidity of American change, stand emotionally and psychologically much farther away, is quite deep. Indeed, sometimes as deep as the cultural distance between Yeats's *Autobiographies* and a Bessie Smith blues. This is the historical background to those incidents of family strife in *Black Boy* which have caused reviewers to question Wright's judgment of Negro emotional relationships.

We have here a problem in the sociology of sensibility that is obscured by certain psychological attitudes brought to Negro life by whites.

III

The first is the attitude which compels whites to impute to Negroes sentiments, attitudes, and insights which, as a group living under certain definite social conditions, Negroes could not humanly possess. It is the identical mechanism which William Empson identifies in literature as "pastoral." It implies that since Negroes possess the richly human virtues credited to them, then their social position is advantageous and should not be bettered; and, continuing syllogistically, the white individual need feel no guilt over his participation in Negro oppression.

The second attitude is that which leads whites to misjudge Negro passion, looking upon it as they do, out of the turgidity of their own frustrated yearning for emotional warmth, their capacity for sensation having been constricted by the impersonal mechanized relationships typical of bourgeois society. The Negro is idealized into a symbol of sensation, of unhampered social and sexual relationships. And when *Black Boy* questions their illusion they are thwarted much in the manner of the occidental who, after observing the erotic character of a primitive dance, "shacks up" with a native woman — only to discover that far from possessing the hair-trigger sexual responses of a Stork Club "babe," she is relatively phlegmatic.

The point is not that American Negroes are primitives, but that as a group, their social situation does not provide for the type of emotional relationships attributed them. For how could the South, recognized as a major part of the backward third of the nation, [see] flower in the black, most brutalized section of its population, those forms of human relationships achievable only in the most highly developed areas of civilization?

Champions of this "Aren't-Negroes-Wonderful?" school of thinking often bring Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson forward as examples of highly developed sensibility, but actually they are only its *promise*. Both received their development from an extensive personal contact with European culture, free from the influences which shape southern Negro personality. In the United States, Wright, who is the only Negro literary artist of equal caliber, had to wait years and escape to another environment before discovering the moral and ideological equivalents of his childhood attitudes.

Man cannot express that which does not exist — either in the form of dreams, ideas, or realities — in his environment. Neither his thoughts nor his feelings, his sensibility nor his intellect are fixed, innate qualities. They are processes which arise out of the interpenetration of human instinct with environment, through the process called experience; each changing and being changed by the other. Negroes cannot possess many of the sentiments attributed to them because the same changes in environment which, through experience, enlarge man's intellect (and thus his capacity for still greater change) also modify his feelings; which in turn increase his sensibility, i.e. his sensitivity to refinements of impression and subtleties of emotion. The extent of these changes depends upon the quality of political and cultural freedom in the environment.

Intelligence tests have measured the quick rise in intellect which takes place in southern Negroes after moving north, but little attention has been paid to the mutations effected in their sensibilities. However, the two go hand in hand. Intellectual complexity is accompanied by emotional complexity; refinement of thought, by refinement of feeling. The movement north affects more than the Negro's wage scale, it affects his entire psychosomatic structure.

The rapidity of Negro intellectual growth in the North is due partially to objective factors present in the environment, to influences of the industrial city, and to a greater political freedom. But there are also changes within the "inner world." In the North energies are released and given *intellectual* channelization — energies which in most Negroes in the South have been forced to take either a *physical* form or, as with potentially intellectual types like Wright, to be expressed as nervous tension, anxiety, and hysteria. Which is nothing mysterious. The human organism responds to environmental stimuli by converting them into either physical and/or intellectual energy. And what is called hysteria is suppressed intellectual energy expressed physically.

The "physical" character of their expression makes for much of the difficulty in understanding American Negroes. Negro music and dances are frenziedly erotic; Negro religious ceremonies violently ecstatic; Negro speech strongly rhythmical and weighted with image and gesture. But there is more in this sensuousness than the unrestraint and insensitivity found in primitive cultures; nor is it simply the relatively spontaneous and undifferentiated responses of a people living in close contact with the soil. For despite Jim Crow, Negro life does not exist in a vacuum, but in the seething vortex of those tensions generated by the most highly industrialized of western nations. The welfare of the most humble

black Mississippi sharecropper is affected less by the flow of the seasons and the rhythm of natural events than by the fluctuations of the stock market; even though, as Wright states of his father, the sharecropper's memories, actions, and emotions are shaped by his immediate contact with nature and the crude social relations of the South.

All of this makes the American Negro far different from the "simple" specimen for which he is taken. And the "physical" quality offered as evidence of his primitive simplicity is actually the form of his complexity. The American Negro is a western type whose social condition creates a state which is almost the reverse of the cataleptic trance: Instead of his consciousness being lucid to the reality around it while the body is rigid, here it is the body which is alert, reacting to pressures which the constricting forces of Jim Crow block off from the transforming, concept-creating activity of the brain. The "eroticism" of Negro expression springs from much the same conflict as that displayed in the violent gesturing of a man who attempts to express a complicated concept with a limited vocabulary; thwarted ideational energy is converted into unsatisfactory pantomime, and his words are burdened with meanings they cannot convey. Here lies the source of the basic ambiguity of *Native Son*, wherein in order to translate Bigger's complicated feelings into universal ideas, Wright had to force into Bigger's consciousness concepts and ideas which his intellect could not formulate. Between Wright's skill and knowledge and the potentials of Bigger's mute feelings lay a thousand years of conscious culture.

In the South the sensibilities of both blacks and whites are inhibited by the rigidly defined environment. For the Negro there is relative safety as long as the impulse towards individuality is suppressed. (Lynchings have occurred because Negroes painted their homes.) And it is the task of the Negro family to adjust the child to the southern milieu; through it the currents, tensions, and impulses generated within the human organism by the flux and flow of events are given their distribution. This also gives the group its distinctive character. Which, because of Negroes' suppressed minority position, is very much in the nature of an elaborate but limited defense mechanism. Its function is dual: to protect the Negro from whirling away from the undifferentiated mass of his people into the unknown, symbolized in its most abstract form by insanity, and most concretely by lynching; and to protect him from those unknown forces *within himself* which might urge him to reach out for that social and human equality which the white South says he cannot have. Rather than

throw himself against the charged wires of his prison he annihilates the impulses within him.

The pre-individualistic black community discourages individuality out of self-defense. Having learned through experience that the whole group is punished for the actions of the single member, it has worked out efficient techniques of behavior control. For in many southern communities everyone knows everyone else and is vulnerable to his opinions. In some communities everyone is “related” regardless of blood-ties. The regard shown by the group for its members, its general communal character, and its cohesion are often mentioned. For by comparison with the coldly impersonal relationships of the urban industrial community, its relationships are personal and warm.

Black Boy, however, illustrates that this personal quality, shaped by outer violence and inner fear, is ambivalent. Personal warmth is accompanied by an equally personal coldness, kindness by cruelty, regard by malice. And these opposites are as quickly set off against the member who gestures towards individuality as a lynch mob forms at the cry of rape. Negro leaders have often been exasperated by this phenomenon, and Booker T. Washington (who demanded far less of Negro humanity than Richard Wright) described the Negro community as a basket of crabs, wherein should one attempt to climb out, the others immediately pull him back.

The member who breaks away is apt to be more impressed by its negative than by its positive character. He becomes a stranger even to his relatives and he interprets gestures of protection as blows of oppression — from which there is no hiding place, because every area of Negro life is affected. Even parental love is given a qualitative balance akin to “sadism.” And the extent of beatings and psychological maimings meted out by southern Negro parents rivals those described by the nineteenth-century Russian writers as characteristic of peasant life under the Czars. The horrible thing is that the cruelty is also an expression of concern, of love.

In discussing the inadequacies for democratic living typical of the education provided Negroes by the South, a Negro educator has coined the term *mis-education*. Within the ambit of the black family this takes the form of training the child away from curiosity and adventure, against reaching out for those activities lying beyond the borders of the black community. And when the child resists, the parent discourages him, first with the formula “That there’s for white folks. Colored

can't have it," and finally with a beating.

It is not, then, the family and communal violence described by *Black Boy* that is unusual, but that Wright *recognized* and made no peace with its essential cruelty — even when, like a babe freshly emerged from the womb, he could not discern where his own personality ended and it began. Ordinarily, both parent and child are protected against this cruelty — seeing it as love and finding subjective sanction for it in the spiritual authority of the Fifth Commandment, and on the secular level in the legal and extralegal structure of the Jim Crow system. The child who did not rebel, or who was unsuccessful in his rebellion, learned a masochistic submissiveness and a denial of the impulse towards western culture when it stirred within him.

IV

Why then have southern whites, who claim to “know” the Negro, missed all this? Simply because they too are armored against the horror and the cruelty. Either they deny the Negro's humanity and feel no cause to measure his actions against civilized norms, or they protect themselves from their guilt in the Negro's condition and from their fear that their cooks might poison them, or that their nursemaids might strangle their infant charges, or that their field hands might do them violence, by attributing to them a superhuman capacity for love, kindness, and forgiveness. Nor does this in any way contradict their stereotyped conviction that all Negroes (meaning those with whom they have no contact) are given to the most animal behavior.

It is only when the individual, whether white or black, *rejects* the pattern that he awakens to the nightmare of his life. Perhaps much of the South's regressive character springs from the fact that many, jarred by some casual crisis into wakefulness, flee hysterically into the sleep of violence or the coma of apathy again. For the penalty of wakefulness is to encounter even more violence and horror than the sensibilities can sustain unless translated into some form of social action. Perhaps the impassioned character so noticeable among those white southern liberals so active in the Negro's cause is due to their sense of accumulated horror; their passion — like the violence in Faulkner's novels — is evidence of a profound spiritual vomiting.

This compulsion is even more active in Wright and the increasing number of Negroes who have said an irrevocable “no” to the southern pattern. Wright learned that it is not enough merely to reject the white

South, but that he had also to reject that part of the South which lay within. As a rebel he formulated that rejection negatively, because it was the negative face of the Negro community upon which he looked most often as a child. It is this he is contemplating when he writes:

Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it. And when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered if clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember were native to man. I asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered, won, struggled and suffered for, preserved in ritual from one generation to another.

But far from implying that Negroes have no capacity for culture, as one critic interprets it, this is the strongest affirmation that they have. Wright is pointing out what should be obvious (especially to his Marxist critics): that Negro sensibility is socially and historically conditioned; that western culture must be won, confronted like the animal in a Spanish bullfight, dominated by the red shawl of codified experience, and brought heaving to its knees.

Wright knows perfectly well that Negro life is a by-product of western civilization, and that in it, if only one possesses the humanity and humility to see, are to be discovered all those impulses, tendencies, life and cultural forms, to be found elsewhere in western society.

The problem arises because the special condition of Negroes in the United States, including the defensive character of Negro life itself (the “will towards organization” noted in the western capitalist appears in the Negro as a will to camouflage, to dissimulate) so distorts these forms as to render their recognition as difficult as finding a wounded quail against the brown and yellow leaves of a Mississippi thicket — even the spilled blood blends with the background. Having himself been in the position of the quail — to expand the metaphor — Wright’s wounds have told him both the question and the answer which every successful hunter must discover for himself: “Where would I hide if *I* were a wounded quail?” But perhaps that requires more sympathy with one’s quarry than most hunters possess. Certainly it requires such a sensitivity to the shifting guises of humanity under pressure as to allow them to identify themselves with the human content, whatever its outer form; and even with those southern Negroes to whom Paul Robeson’s name is only a rolling sound in the fear-charged air.

Let us close with one final word about the blues: Their attraction lies in this, that they at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of

tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self. Nowhere in America today is there social or political action based upon the solid realities of Negro life depicted in *Black Boy*; perhaps that is why, with its refusal to offer solutions, it is like the blues. Yet, in it thousands of Negroes will for the first time see their destiny in public print. Freed here of fear and the threat of violence, their lives have at last been organized, scaled down to possessable proportions. And in this lies Wright's most important achievement: he has converted the American Negro impulse towards self-annihilation and "going-under-ground" into a will to confront the world, to evaluate his experience honestly and throw his findings unashamedly into the guilty conscience of America.

Little Magazine, What Now?

BY PAUL BIXLER

Volume 8, Number 1 Spring 1948

Paul Bixler's essays appeared in these pages from March 1941 until the summer of 1979. He served on the editorial board of the *Antioch Review* for many years. He died in 1991.

Anyone who wants to consider the fate of the little magazine today must give at least preliminary attention to the book on the subject compiled by Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Caroline F. Ulrich. This necessity occurs because the little magazine historically has had its sources in many a backwater and obscure literary freshet. The book charts much undiscovered territory and anyone who would set foot in the area now must examine its map although some of the guide marks may prove mistaken. *The Little Magazine* (Princeton University Press, 1946) is an "authority," to be reckoned with even when it is contradictory, confused, or dead wrong.

Hoffman-Allen-Ulrich fix the beginning date of the little magazine movement as 1912. This would take on more significance if the authors had set the fact in its socio-literary context. Although there were a scattering of little magazines before that time, it is true that little-magazine publishing became a phenomenon only after *The Masses* (begun in 1911), *Poetry* (1912), *Blast* (1914), the *Little Review* (1914), *The Midland* (1915), had established a pattern. (It is characteristic of the authors that they chose the year and the appearance of *Poetry* rather than of *The Masses* to fix the movement.) But the years 1910-12 also saw the end of

the muckrakers. That the little magazine was preceded by the muckraking journal and by its accompanying literary ferment, Hoffman-Allen-Ulrich seem entirely unaware. From their story one gets an impression of considerable literary excitement, but it appears to be an excitement which arose out of little more than a superior sort of spontaneous combustion.

The book's better part is its bibliography and index, upon which the authors (chiefly Mr. Hoffman and Miss Ulrich) have showed in more than 200 pages a meticulousness and precision well beyond what is normally expected in such matters. The 540 little magazines listed in one bibliographical alphabet and the 96 "fellow travellers of little magazines" listed in another are given life histories (or obituaries) replete with inclusive dates, places of publication, editors, most frequently published authors, and often a thumbnail sketch of policy and contents. The bibliography is obviously not exhaustive yet it has been receptive of anything in English or under American editorship. One of the characteristics of the little magazine in English, too little remarked upon, is its geographical spread. A hundred and thirty-nine of the 540 little magazines and 43 of the 96 "fellow travelers" are listed as published outside the United States. The majority of these foreigners or expatriates appeared in Britain or on the European Continent, but it is interesting, if nothing more, to find three of them published in Mexico, three in Spain, eleven in Australia, three in the USSR (at Moscow). Eric Bentley has shrewdly remarked that the little-magazine movement has not been so much international as homeless. But that truth should not be allowed to obscure the accomplishment of the bibliography, which, after a manner of speaking, documents it.

Not so much can be said of the rest of the volume. In somewhat more space than they have given to the bibliography and the index, the authors have attempted a "history." The plan has been to divide the little magazine into types (about which more later) and to intersperse chapters on each type with chapters of chronology. This turns out to be a kind of glorified expansion of certain items of the bibliography. These pages give evidence, for one thing, of the great inbreeding among many little magazine editors and authors, but that is a fact with which Hoffman-Allen-Ulrich never come to grips; of the social setting within which the little magazine movement took place we get very little. Instead, we are regaled with endless details (interesting enough in their way) of authors, editors, and particular magazines; we are fed gossip and given a grabbag of odds and ends.

In the brief concluding chapter, and even more clearly in the introduction, the authors make a stab at the criticism and the social history presumably necessary to the job they have set themselves. The relationship of the little magazine to the mainstream of literature turns out to be its relationship to commercial publishing. In the literary world, according to the authors, the little magazines are the advance guard breaking the way for the large commercial operators. As they put it:

The commercial publishers — the large publishing houses and the big “quality” magazines — are the rear guard. In a few instances they are the rear guard because their editors are conservative in taste, slow to recognize good writing; but more frequently the commercial publishers are the rear guard because their editors will accept a writer only after the advance guard has proved that he is, or can be made, commercially profitable. Whatever the reason for their backwardness, few commercial houses or magazines of the past thirty years can claim the honor of having served the advance guard banner; they have discovered and sponsored only about 20 percent of our post-1912 writers; they have done nothing to initiate the new literary groups. To their credit, it may be said that they have ultimately accepted any author, no matter how experimental, after he has been talked about for a period of years — sometimes a good many years.

Now there is partial truth in this pattern, but nowhere in the book is it examined critically for its social or literary implications. Instead, it is accepted mechanically and “proved” statistically. One would immediately question, as a sample, the idea that the little magazine is a feeder of the big “quality” magazine. For every William Faulkner whose stories have made the *Saturday Evening Post* or the *Atlantic Monthly* there are ten other graduates of the little magazine whose skill in short fiction is small or whose short stories will rarely, if ever, be accepted by the commercial magazines. Book publishers should have their profession correctly represented, too. They do not compete directly with magazine editors — even little-magazine editors. They are looking for books, not short stories or essays, and since the young writer will frequently and sensibly begin with less ambitious efforts, it would be fairly normal for his first work to appear in little magazines rather than between boards.

That 80 percent of our post-1912 writers have been the discoveries of the little magazines is now by way of becoming a literary cliché simply because Hoffman-Allen-Ulrich have asserted it as fact, and because the statement, an easy one to repeat, has been taken up by reviewers. Its documentation is not in the book but in an essay, “The Advance Guard” by Charles Allen in the *Sewanee Review* (summer 1943). Here Allen traced the beginnings of sixty writers “generally accepted as representative of the various literary and philosophical outlooks” whose first work

appeared after 1912, and found that 90 percent of them published their early work in little magazines. (He deducted 10 percent “as possible margin of error.”) In his selection of writers Allen was partial to poets and he left out of account at least another sixty writers of quite as great importance (such as Bernard De Voto, F Scott Fitzgerald, Ring Lardner, John O’Hara, Thomas Wolfe, Dorothy Parker). But it is not so much his figures, faulty enough as they are, that seem strange, but the fact that he used figures in the first place as the basic element in his and his fellow authors’ estimate of what the little magazine has been worth.

The little magazine, then, has been historically both more and less than Hoffman-Allen-Ulrich allow. It has a place both in social and literary history which they do not so much deny as neglect. It has been more than “revolt” and experiment, and advance guard. And on the other hand, it was not altogether the great literary hothouse of the ’20s and ’30s that they make out.

II

Just what is a little magazine? Allen-Hoffman-Ulrich divide the field into six classes — poetical, regional, leftist, experimental, critical, and eclectic — and all are given chapters in their book. In this pattern they reflect the decision of Allen in his earlier essay, who remarked after setting up his categories: “One can make such divisions provided one does not take them too seriously.” (Though most of the rest of the paragraph in the essay was incorporated in the book, this one was dropped.) Elsewhere in their book they say of their categories:

Each of the six groups of periodicals that we have mentioned contributed valuably to a regenerative literature. Perhaps those magazines devoted to the experimental philosophies and techniques . . . have most clearly performed the advance guard function. The regionalists or proletarians [leftists] might, and sometimes did, attain recognition without little magazine help, but the experimentalists rarely could rely on such fortune.

In this paragraph the authors offer a strange, hesitant questioning of the structure of their book and of its chief idea as to the nature of the little magazine. I am inclined to agree with the questioning. In spite of all the space devoted to them, the six categories seem to be casual devices not to be taken “too seriously.” Three of them — poetical, experimental, and critical — could be better explained simply on form — respectively, on the poem, the short story, and the critical essay. The eclectic type seems to be a kind of cross-section of these three and there are hints that on its upper levels, it shades out of the little-magazine group into what the

authors term the fellow traveler. This leaves the regional and leftist categories, which seem clear enough, but you will note in the above paragraph that it is these two which have not so clearly “performed the advance guard function.”

And the performance of this function is, to the authors, of supreme importance. It is so important that the word *little* in front of *magazine* is not really sound; in fact, “in a sense,” the word is “vague and even unfairly derogatory.” The correct term is *avant-garde*. And it is so inclusive that anything outside it falls inevitably into the category of the fellow traveler.

We must, then, have the fellow travelers defined for us. They include undergraduate literary magazines and periodicals devoted to arts other than writing, but the best examples seem to be the quarterly reviews, “not money-minded,” but the “intelligent, dignified, critical representatives of an intelligent, dignified, critical minority . . . conscious of a serious responsibility which does not often permit them the freedom to experiment or to seek out unknown writers.” Except for the *Yale Review* and the *Virginia Quarterly*, whose stability and respectability and advertising are now beyond questioning, the reviews and most of the other fellow travelers could be called little magazines that have made good. Many a little-magazine editor today will be found yearning to join this more or less successful group if only in terms of a relative economic security.

In their “Conclusion” the authors project the pattern of a literary phenomenon of the '20s and '30s into the present and the indefinite future. In their original analysis they inadequately examined the social and cultural background against which the little magazine developed. And at last having saturated themselves in the fascinating lore of personalities and isms and cultural tidbits, they cannot conceive but that the *avant-garde* will go on and on. For the future they briefly examine a number of possibilities, and they wind up:

Finally, it is possible that the *avant-garde* will become conservative, even reactionary, in its theory and practice. It is not altogether ridiculous to imagine a revolt, sponsored by little magazines, against what are now viewed as revolutionary literary forms and styles. A cry for “Intelligibility!” may arise from the rank and file of unknown writers, who may forthwith establish mimeographed sheets quoting from the poems of John Greenleaf Whittier and other “primary” writers. This, however, is the least likely of all probabilities.

It may be unlikely, but it is not out of character with what the authors have given us on page after page as the core of little-magazine history.

Why, one might ask, does the little magazine have to go on forever being adolescent or, as these authors put it, *avant-garde*? New magazines and young authors will always have fresh enthusiasms. But does all growth take place in a vacuum and has all the experimenting been done in vain? The truth is that there are already, and have been for some time, signs of maturity. Since we are in search of the nature of the little magazine, let's discard such words as *avant-garde* (which has been applied to all and not, as it should be, to *some* little magazines) and find terms which will apply not only to what the little magazine has been, but what it is today and what it could become. Let me suggest a working description:

Size. It must seem obvious that the little magazine is a small enterprise. Not only is it not brought out with the idea of making a profit, it frequently, even with financial help, is lucky to make ends meet. Its editors often serve without pay, and its contributors, if they do not serve similarly, receive no more than pin money. Its circulation may be a few hundred and it cannot rise to more than a few thousand; many a little magazine has begun with a readership made up of its editors, its contributors, its would-be contributors, and their personal friends. Usually the format is not self-consciously small, but the lack of advertising (such are popular standards) will at least make it seem small.

Stability. Just because a magazine is little it does not follow, as one might suppose, that it must collapse after a couple of issues. One editor of the 1920s put the limit of a little magazine's vitality at two years, but this kind of thing seems an idiosyncrasy of the times, when it was fashionable to let a magazine die and then a few months later to found another with a purpose barely if at all distinguishable from that of the first. The little magazine can live as long as its editors have ideas, good health, and sufficient funds. It usually requires a subsidy. Supplementary funds may be furnished by a university, a book publisher, or a literary-minded fat cat. It has been suggested that the federal government give assistance after the manner of the Federal Theatre Arts Project, but a more logical idea would be for the federal government to allow, or even encourage, authors currently in the money (from Hollywood sales or best-seller successes) to contribute a portion of their heavy income taxes to the support of little magazines or similar literary and artistic ventures. (This at least would furnish a financial connection between the popular and serious literature.) In any case, the little magazine does not serve its purpose by going out of business. And its stability and continuation are probably as much dependent on an annual subsidy as on anything else.

Control. That the little magazine usually needs a subsidy in order to live and grow does not mean that it can safely accept control from anyone but its own editors. Most institutions other than the academic will not assume the role of financial god-father for a magazine without also calling the editorial tune or even attempting to fill the publication with its own publicity. (A notable exception is the Common Council for American Unity which subsidizes *Common Ground*. Allen-Hoffman-Ulrich do not list *Common Ground* even under the fellow travelers, but I should argue that it is a first-rate little magazine.) The university, more sophisticated in intellectual matters, will usually offer a form of editorial freedom, but this, too, may be watered down by academic timidity, lack of conviction, or conventional restraints. Whatever the financial sources, the editors must be strong men, knowing their own minds and their own policy. Two or three editors are better than one, but it does not follow that eight or ten are better than two or three. The little magazine lives or dies in its individual free expression, and for this result the editors must be both free and responsible.

Content. The little magazine cannot be a professional journal nor the organ of a professional society, but this does not mean that it cannot have standards of intellectual and artistic judgment. There has been a conventional decree that the little magazine must serve the cause of revolt. That decree comes down from the time when freedom was conceived principally as an opportunity for “blowing the lid off.” So far as content is concerned, the little magazine is a small enterprise because its material is minor or unpopular or of limited appeal. Its fiction, through strangeness in form or subject, may be somewhat difficult to read. Its ideas may be socially (read “conventionally”) difficult of acceptance or they may be hard to understand; they do not have to be half-baked nor must they be confined to the literary. If this definition does not seem to apply fully to the little magazine of the '20s and '30s, particularly in the area of ideas, please remember that I am speaking also of what the little magazine may become. I shall follow this up further on.

III

Let's look at the content of the recent little magazine. Of the total enervating mass of periodical journalism, the little magazine, though it reaches a relatively tiny audience, is no insignificant part. No one can pretend to complete knowledge of all of it unless he gives attention to little else. But a fair sampling should afford sufficient clues.

The pattern of little-magazine fiction is difficult to establish. It may be said for one thing that its form is no straitjacket; gone are any strictures about the well-made story, the O. Henry or any other ending, and even the necessity of rebellion, revolution, or experiment. At first glance, also, the subject matter may seem to show as much variety as the form. Twelve of the thirty short stories selected by Martha Foley for *The Best American Short Stories, 1946*, and ten of the thirty which she chose for 1947 were taken from little magazines. They share with the stories from the quality commercial group (*Harper's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar*) and from a scattering of the slicks (*Good Housekeeping*, *McCall's*) an emphasis on the theme of children (usually in relation to parents or teachers), on the individual's isolation from society, and a certain nostalgia for times past. But these little-magazine selections differ from their fellows chiefly in two respects. They exhibit a greater awareness of social problems; eight of them, as against two from other magazines, include race relations as a major or minor theme or as part of the psychological atmosphere. And their characters and fictional situations are frequently unlovely and unpleasant. This latter characteristic would not be accounted bad if it did not sometimes seem to be cherished for its own sake—as though the authors were employing their writing as a defense against the outside world or even as a weapon whereby they could vicariously attack the unhappiness of their own childhood. I do not want to exaggerate this tendency; it is by no means generally true. But at its worst, in such a story as "The Cocoon" by John B. L. Goodwin, a horror tale without any philosophical, moral, or social significance whatever and with a lonely frightened child as the chief character, publication would hardly seem justified.

In Miss Foley's collections, the fictional products of the little magazine have the special advantage of being placed side by side with some of those in the commercial journals. But they cannot be other than highly selective and they are chosen by one person with special ends in view. A better perspective is possible if one examines the more inclusive work of particular magazines as made accessible in *Accent Anthology* (Harcourt, Brace, 1946) and *The Partisan Reader* (Dial Press, 1946).

Accent, begun in 1940, is one of the best of the academic little magazines. Its campus background (it is published at the University of Illinois) has not noticeably affected its freshness or given it literary inhibitions. Forty percent of the bulk of six years' publication have been squeezed between boards. The fiction section indicates that the editors are hospitable to work of a considerable variety. It includes stories of social prob-

lems, of poetic mood, of experiment in form. There are psychological studies and fragmentary snapshots of Life. There is some tendency towards the foreign or unfamiliar setting, towards the nostalgic or quaint. The best story of the group is Walter Van Tilberg Clark's "The Indian Well," a perceptive, brilliantly told narrative of an old prospector in the desert country. It might have appeared in a quality magazine or with a few minor changes (today possibly with none at all) in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Partisan Review, of "bohemian" or extra-academic extraction, might be called the bellwether of all little magazines. (It has just become a monthly and may in the future pass into the quality group.) Its history covers a period of more than ten years, but the bulk of selections in the *Reader* parallel the years of *Accent*. Its fiction shows many of the same characteristics—flashes of insight, frequent attenuation and intellectualization, some interest in form and experiment. But something else has been added or imposed. These stories are more of a piece. They show a definite philosophy and a consistent outlook on life. Their authors have business with middle-class mores, and they are aware of a *Partisan* thesis, that the intellectual is alienated.

The outstanding story, Mary McCarthy's "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt," which concerns an affair between a woman intellectual and an American businessman, is a modern masterpiece. It has both conflict and substance, elements so frequently missing from little-magazine fiction that their absence might almost be assumed to be a hallmark. Yet it could have appeared nowhere but in a little magazine, and most particularly in *Partisan*.

From this and other evidence, one cannot say that little-magazine fiction is all it might be. Yet it stands up well with other fiction. If honest short story writers find it difficult in a confused world to organize their material into meaningful patterns, so do modern novelists. Too seldom are either able to develop major relationships or major situations. Too often they seem to stand on the rim of the real world grappling with aberrations and abnormalities, with wild dim shapes of a scarcely-ever land. One may hesitate to attempt a diagnosis of this weakness. But I would hazard a guess that at least part of the difficulty comes from a lack of the wisdom necessary to understand or handle such ideas—a lack for which the American "pragmatic" tradition bears some responsibility.

At this point it is worth taking note of what has happened to book publishing. Traditionally, the creative writer has very often depended upon the book publisher for assistance in his early development. His

publisher (whenever he has shown promise as a novelist) has assisted him both with money and advice, given him an advance at the psychological moment, and held his hand or carried him psychologically past the first novels which do not make their keep. This relationship is now being interfered with by excessive publishing costs. Where the publisher could once count on breaking even on a novel with a sale of 2,500-5,000 copies, he cannot do so now short of 6,000-10,000 copies. And that is only one of a number of forces turning the publisher's attention away from the development of new writers and from the best publishing practices. The result is to throw greater responsibility for literature upon the little magazine — a responsibility which it was never designed to bear except in part.

The little magazine does a good job of publishing fiction. What is to its particular credit, there was never a time when the serious short story writer had a better chance to be published regardless of his manner or inclination. (Miss Foley records that 1946 saw a new record set in the number of published short stories and that 1947 broke that record both in the number of stories and of new authors writing them. Although she is not explicit about it her conclusion would seem to apply more to little magazines — or at least no less — than to others.) This does not mean that the author of fiction is properly paid for his effort, or that he can make even a partial living out of writing for the little magazine. But the little magazine cannot be expected to pay properly. It is doing its primary job when it publishes, and when one takes account of the growing quality market (which includes *Tomorrow*, *Commentary*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, and others as well as *Harper's*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New Yorker*), it appears to be publishing its full share.

IV

One cannot say so much for its nonfiction. Nearly all the articles appearing in nearly all little magazines are concerned with literary criticism. By and large such criticism has become very cozy and intimate, a pursuing of the tortured word until it yells for mercy and a squeezing out of meaning until it is too thin and isolated to be understood short of an occupational lifetime. One gets an uneasy feeling that some of these little-magazine critics like a particular poem for the very difficulty it presents to the layman. In our broken world such a solitary or isolated pursuit of technical literary efficiency has come to resemble more and more a special kind of division of labor. In its exercise it seems like the

pleasure of the armchair detective in solving a crime or, on a somewhat lower level, of the Monday-morning quarterback who replays Saturday's game. So much of the criticism is technical that when it does, on occasion, rise to philosophy, it turns out to be a technician talking philosophy — than which nothing could be more misrepresentative.

Literary criticism monopolizes the nonfiction pages of the little magazine — and too much of it is confined to the type described above. But the little magazine is a large mansion and it could accommodate even an atomized literary criticism if occasionally it housed something else. Almost alone among its fellows, *Partisan Review* has made some pretense to breadth. It began in 1936 out of a political interest — and it has been unsteadily losing that interest ever since. It has published the brilliant philosophic group of essays, "The Failure of Nerve," and after the war the political series on "The Future of Socialism," but more and more the battle for any other than literary values has become a losing one. Perhaps the final blow came in 1943 when Dwight Macdonald left the magazine to start his own journal, *Politics* — which itself, after a brilliant interlude, seems to have entered a period of innocuous desuetude.

Partisan has constantly plugged the line that the intellectual is alienated. But one wonders how the intellectual can gain morale when he turns out to be, nine times out of ten, a writer or an artist? Where are the lawyers, the doctors, the scientists, the engineers, the technicians — yes, even the philosophers? The intellectual, it seems, is not even a whole intellectual but a literary one — which is something pretty special.

Partisan has served the cause of general ideas better than any other little magazine. The overwhelming majority have served it not at all. Last year there was published a new anthology, *American Thought 1947*. Its aim was to publish "a small encyclopedia of the annual crop of thinking in America," to "display the major 'trends' of ideas." Its point of view was serious; the slick commercial magazines were barred from consideration and journalism was included only to the extent that articles were to be understood by the intelligent reader, "yet not outraging the sensibilities of the expert" in the particular area treated. One might have thought that such an opportunity would have provided a field day for the little magazine, but not so. Out of thirty-eight selections only thirteen came from that quarter, and of these, eight were from journals unrecorded in *The Little Magazine*. Four selections (the limit set by the editors for selections from any one) came from the *American Scholar*, three from the *Antioch Review*, one from *Science and Society*. It may be argued

from my own criterion that the last is not a little magazine but I should include it in spite of its academic dullness.

Publication of the anthology provided other evidence of the regard in which the article of wisdom or of ideas is held in America. Almost half of the topics originally selected for inclusion were dropped for lack of suitable material. The editors found, too, that a few magazines like *Harpers's* and the *Atlantic Monthly* were excellent sources for articles but that from there on in the selecting was more difficult; for an article here and there they were reduced to such media as the *Journal of Parapsychology*, the *American Scientist*, the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* — technical or academic journals, a publishing area in which America is more than sufficiently represented. In spite of editorial care and vigorous promotion, the venture failed. The publisher had planned to make the anthology an annual affair, to issue it in South America, Europe, and eventually elsewhere as a broad but representative example of what and how Americans think. But Americans themselves did not respond to any such adventurous enterprise and the Gresham Press cannot afford to repeat it.

Why do Americans (and so many American intellectuals) prove so allergic to the publication and the dissemination of general ideas? American intellectual tradition is against it, of course. So also are recent trends towards mass production and division of labor in publishing and towards specialization and fragmentation in thought.

Against such trends the little magazine might prove a buffer or foil. But neither editors nor authors are thoroughly familiar with broad ideas, and where they have gained some familiarity, they find dealing with such ideas an uncongenial occupation. Within campus walls the Ph.D. complex has constantly driven the academic occupants towards more specialization, more footnoting, more making of little ideas out of big ones. To do the job that needs to be done with ideas takes boldness and style. The American academic community, by and large, has been conducive to neither.

Nor are the bohemian or nonacademic thinkers in any better shape. They may have the urge and they may write more boldly, but they lack sufficient background. For what background they do have has usually been acquired in the university classroom of the academic group and only too frequently at a time when ideas were held in less repute than they are today. Nor does the bohemian's disorientation from the mainstream of American life help him to write intelligently or persuasively

about American ideas. Henry Wallace's following among the intelligentsia, for example, is no tribute to their grasp of political realities.

The English order these matters somewhat better. *Horizon*, England's leading literary magazine, publishes in almost every issue at least one article of more than literary breadth or depth — the sort of piece conspicuous by its absence among *Horizon's* American literary brethren. In four issues of *Horizon* which come to hand I find the following: "Russia's Byzantine Heritage" by Arnold Toynbee (August 1947); "Occupation of Japan" by Noel F. Busch (September 1947); "Surrender of Free Choice" by Roy Harrod (December 1947); "Sin" by Bertrand Russell (January 1948). Furthermore, English little magazines like *Phoenix Quarterly*, *Voices*, *Now* ("a Literary and Social Review") and *Politics and Letters* ("a Quarterly Survey of Intellectual Background"), in which literature is only one of a number of the strands of thought, have no counterpart in America.

Perhaps the most spectacular effort here was Dwight Macdonald's *Politics*, but its future is now uncertain. The *University Observer*, begun last year at the University of Chicago, appeared to be striking close to the mark on the academic side (certainly it is close to the English journals mentioned above), but it attracted no more than a few hundred subscribers and failed after two issues. These two recent efforts stand alone, and it may be noteworthy that they have emphasized their purpose and their own division of labor by largely ignoring literature. On the other hand, the latest American venture, the *Hudson Review*, announced as "the first major literary magazine of the postwar period . . . the first full-scale review started in this country since 1939," appears to be doing business at the same old stand. In spite of a brief bow to politics and philosophy in its prospectus, the table of contents presents Allen Tate ("The New Criticism"), Yvor Winters ("Gerard Manley Hopkins"), R. P. Blackmuir ("The Possessed"), Francis Ferguson ("Racine's Bérénice: Action as Rational"), and Herbert Read ("The Present Situation of Art in Europe") just as though this sort of thing were not already being done in a dozen other little magazines.

The conception of the little magazine as purely an organ of literary experiment dies hard. It is such a conception which the editors of *Partisan Review* have assumed when they say (*Partisan Reader*, p.685) that the need for the little magazine has been gradually disappearing. The sheer amount of such publication today would deny it, and as I have already indicated, the contribution of the little magazine in the field of fiction continues to justify itself.

What I argue is that free expression should be openly and vigorously encouraged by the little magazine in other areas. The young writer of fiction today faces recognized obstacles in the blandishments and the exploitation inherent in Hollywood, the radio, and the book clubs. But young nonfiction writers of ideas face the possibility of demoralization, too, and they find it no easier to organize their world of ideas or to make it comprehensible. The typical attraction for the brilliant nonfiction writer is to *Life* or *Time*, where the constant drive is towards fragmentation and collectivization. And his opposite number in the universities, who has elected to stay closer to what is presumed to be the home of ideas, finds himself bogged down in footnotes or with an extremely limited marketplace for what he has to say. The nonfiction, as well as the fiction, writer needs time and opportunity to develop his ability without the pressure of an institution (journalistic or academic) at his back calling for "results."

Edmund Wilson, writing recently of the publishing difficulty which faced Paul Rosenfeld, remarked: "There was at that time [about 1940] not a single periodical that would print the work of a writer simply because he knew his subject and wrote about it well." This may seem exaggerated, yet it is true that many a little magazine has been more committed to its own established little clique of writers and its own special brand of knowledge than the commercial press has been to its clichés and taboos. And if such a statement had relevance for a music critic, how much more important may it seem for the writer on other than aesthetic subjects?

Wisdom cannot be organized. It cannot be departmentalized. It cannot be atomized. The little magazine could enormously increase its present contribution to such wisdom as we have, if it opened its pages — hitherto largely confined to arts and letters — to science, politics, psychology, economics, history, and even such intellectual problems and phenomena as war and bureaucracy. Alone, among all our media of communication, it could give the author of ideas a feeling of wholeness and the chance to speak his real mind. There he might be advised, but he would not run the risk of being atomized by editorial or other influences or collaborated upon until his individuality is damaged or is claimed by someone else. That freedom is, or should be, the responsibility of the little magazine.

The Second Decade
1951 – 1960



Some Observations on Changes in Leisure Attitudes

BY DAVID RIESMAN

Volume 12, Number 4 Winter 1952

David Riesman's "Observations" appeared in the *Review* in fall 1951 and summer 1952, and his article "Academic Colleagueship and Teaching" appeared in fall 1985. He has published numerous books and articles on sociology, and is professor emeritus at Harvard.

...our sole delight was play; and for this we were punished by those who yet themselves were doing the like. But elder folks' idleness is called "business"; that of boys, being really the same, is punished by those elders; and none commiserates either boys or men. For will any of sound discretion approve of my being beaten as a boy, because, by playing at ball, I made less progress in studies which I was to learn, only that, as a man, I might play more unbeseemingly? and what else did he who beat me? who, if worsted in some trifling discussion with his fellow-tutor, was more embittered and jealous than I when beaten at ball by a playfellow?

— *The Confessions of St. Augustine*

Ten years ago, I sat as a member of an international committee engaged in drawing up a Bill of Rights to be presented to some presumptive postwar agency. Among the rights proposed was one stating that all men and women had a right to "reasonable leisure," and that it was the duty of governments to make this right effective. In the ensuing debate, this was dubbed (by a Harvard professor) "Riesman's freedom

from work” amendment, and, though the amendment carried, many of the hard-working delegates regarded it as a concession to the modern cult of effortlessness. Others thought the issue irrelevant, on the ground that, until the right to work was secure, the right to leisure could wait. This was my first introduction to the discovery that many people are uncomfortable when discussing leisure: as with sex, they want to make a joke of it. And there is no doubt that most of us feel vulnerable in a milieu that increasingly asks us whether we are good players as well as good workers — a problem St. Augustine’s serious-minded, self-deceiving elders do not appear to have faced. For us, at any rate, there is nothing easy about effortlessness. I want here to trace some of the sources of vulnerability.

I

In his novel *The Bostonians*, written about seventy-five years ago, Henry James describes a week that his hero, Basil Ransom, passed at Provincetown on the Cape. He smoked cigars; he wandered footloose to the wharves; perhaps he read an occasional book; it does not appear that he swam. He was, pro tem, a “gentleman of leisure.” It may be that a few fossils of the species are preserved in the Athenaeum, but I rather doubt if they can be found in Provincetown today. At least my impression is that people who go to such places for the summer appear to lead strenuously artsy and craftsy lives: even if they lie on the beach, they are getting a competitively handsome tan, but most of the time they appear to be playing energetic tennis, taking exhausting walks, entertaining children and guests by that mixture of grit, insects, and tomatoes known as a picnic; and in the evening attending lectures, the experimental theatre, and colloquia in private houses. While they may be less systematically engaged than many students in laying by credits, they are gainfully improving themselves in body and mind; and, perhaps unlike many students, they are subject to the additional strain of having to feel and to claim that they are having a good time, being victims of that new form of Puritanism which Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites in their book *Movies* have termed “fun-morality.”

All this in a country in which the average industrial work-week has declined from sixty-four hours in Henry James’s day to around forty in ours, not including the mid-morning coffee break and the other sociabilities which have crept into the hours which the census registers as working ones. We are in the ambivalent position described by Lynn

White, Jr., president of Mills College, commenting on a roundtable on “leisure and human values in industrial civilization” of which he was chairman at the Corning Conference a year ago:

We said, “Ha, ha, I have no leisure; why am I involved in this?” It was a sense of guilt and, at the same time, a sense of pride. In other words, we feel leisure is a cultural value. Theoretically we would rather like to participate in it, but we are sort of proud that we are such responsible members of society that we really have no time for leisure.

Our responsibility extends, in fact, to a concern for how other people — our children, our pupils, our union members, the community at large — are spending their leisure. In fact, those of us who are in the education industry and its allies, such as the library industry, have developed quite substantial interests — vested interests — in other people’s leisure. We see their loose time, as others see their loose change, as our problem and our responsibility. This is, I suggest, one reason why the “gentleman of leisure,” whose portrait Thorstein Veblen drew so sardonically in the ’90s, is obsolete today. Instead, we are all of us — that is, almost all — members of the leisure class, and face its problems. As Eric Larrabee pointed out at Corning, the expansion of the leisure “market” has brought “friction” in its wake.

It is, of course, characteristic of American life that our bonanzas, our windfalls, whether treasures of the soil or treasures of the self, have been interpreted by the most sensitive and responsible among us as problems. I’m not sure but that the hue and cry against Puritanism isn’t beginning to be overdone, and that we won’t come to realize that our moral seriousness — in fact, our fun-morality — is not wholly negative. At the Corning Conference, the Wellesley-educated Hindu author, Miss Santha Rama Rau, scolded us; she commented:

I am wondering why leisure is a problem at all. Surely, nowhere else in the world do people fuss about what to do with their spare time. I think it is rather sad that some kind of guilt has been built up in this particular society so that people feel that they should be productive in their spare time. . . . What is wrong with lying on the beach and relaxing?

I suppose one, perhaps unfair, answer to her is to be found in the six- and seven-year-old Indian children standing guard over their families’ fields all night long, lest a sacred bull trample the crops down and leave the family to starve. It is Puritanism that, in considerable part, has brought us to the point where leisure is or can become a problem for the vast majority. In fact, so great is the sheer quantity of our available leisure and leisure resources, that I do not think we can find very helpful models in other countries.

Recent reading and reflection, and discussion with Mark Benney of the London School of Economics (now visiting lecturer at the University of Chicago), has convinced me that this is true enough, at any rate, for England, from which we once derived our working model of the gentleman of leisure, and from which, too, I suspect the Hindu aristocrats such as Miss Rama Rau have learned more than they will admit. The English remain torn between the aristocratic leisure pattern, which is rural, sportsmanlike, casual, and on the edge of such quasi-criminal activities as cock-fighting, and the middle-class leisure pattern, dating from the sobersides of the Puritan revolution, which is urban, uplifting, strenuous. (The urban working-class pattern, as represented in the London music hall and a vivid "street culture," is pretty much dying out.) A recent extensive survey by Seebohm Rowntree and G. R. Lavers, entitled *English Life and Leisure*, was evidence to me that the English today on the whole know even less than we how to spend leisure — that there is a sameness and lack of imagination about their pastimes and pursuits. The English aristocrats with their natural allies, the lower class, have won the day in the sense that the Victorian middle-class morality appears to be almost dead in England, and sexual intimacy seems the chief leisure resort after puberty. But while the young people are uninhibited, they are not joyful. They have to watch every penny they spend on liquor, but again seem to take no great pleasure in it. They gamble, but often with desperation. The truth is that they can no longer afford the aristocratic vices which are now, with the decline of religious sanctions, psychologically available to them. And the middle-class values of self-improvement are still strong enough so that many are dissatisfied with the aimlessness of their lives; I recall one young middle-class girl, for instance, who told the interviewer that she slept with young men who asked her to, but wished she could find something better to do.

What, then, do Rowntree and Lavers, who are distinguished students of English social life, recommend? They plug the old middle-class model, only more of it. After touring the Scandinavian countries to study leisure practices there, they urge more folk-dancing, more hobbies, more adult education, better books — and, I need hardly add, fewer Hollywood movies.

In fact, their attitude towards Hollywood may be regarded as symptomatic of the attitude of a great many students of leisure — "recreationists" perhaps we'd better call them — here and abroad. In their view, Hollywood is a source of disruptive leisure patterns, of vulgarity, spendthrift living, and false values generally. You know the indict-

ment, I'm sure — an indictment which includes most of our popular culture, radio, TV, and bestsellers as well. Rowntree and Lavers put themselves up, as many school officials have, as angry competitors with this commercial popular culture, waging a losing fight. If they can offer nothing better, I am afraid that both the old aristocratic pattern, which is too expensive, and the old middle-class pattern, which is too didactic, will evaporate from England, leaving nothing much of quality to take their place.

II

Now it is my opinion that Hollywood movies not only are often shoddy but are often profoundly liberating and creative products of the human imagination. And I am not referring to so-called message films, pleas for better race relations or labor relations. I refer rather to such films as *The Asphalt Jungle*, or *All About Eve*, or *An American in Paris*, or *The Marrying Kind*, or *The Great Gatsby*, and many others without any patent social message; some successful, some not; movies which take us out of ourselves or force us back in; movies which open a window on life, and movies which exhibit a nightmarish fantasy. If English leisure is sterile and mean-spirited, I doubt if such movies have made it so. Rather, I think English, and American life also, would be enriched if people learned to understand and appreciate the movies, and could enjoy them in the spirit, at once critical and friendly, with which people at different times and places have enjoyed literature. The thought occurred to me some years ago that our schools and colleges, and particularly our altogether too pious adult education ventures, might begin experimenting with courses on movie appreciation, and popular culture appreciation generally — a movement which would require us to develop something we have not yet got in this country: a corps of gifted movie and radio and TV critics. The beginnings are evident in the work of John Crosby, for instance; what is lacking is any program for developing such critics, operating in the different media and at different levels of irony and sensibility. I argued that such a program might help close the gap which now separates the literary culture of the schools — the culture which such men as Rowntree and Lavers narrowly regard as the only true and genuine culture — from the popular culture of RKO and CBS.

I argued too that such a program might help us get rid once and for all of the current distinction between active and passive recreations — “active” being such things as sports, hobbies, and square dancing, and

“passive” such things as movie-going, TV-watching, and other things parents and teachers wish their children wouldn’t do. For I am convinced that this is not a real distinction: much leisure which appears to be active may be merely muscular: its lactic acid content is high, but there may be little other content, or contentment. And conversely, such supposedly passive pursuits as movie-going can obviously be the most intense experience, the most participative. Indeed, Hollywood movies could hardly corrupt England and Europe if they were as passive and as pacifying as is charged! And so I wanted to teach people to enjoy the movies as participants in a fine performance, and not merely as a place to neck, to eat popcorn, or to pass the time out of the old folks’ reach. In fact, I was particularly eager to develop courses just for the old folks in the understanding of popular culture, thinking in this way not only to open up to them a wide range of imaginative experience but also of helping to close the gap which separates the young, who have been raised with movies, comics, radio, and now TV, from the old who have come to them late if at all, often without the linguistic and emotional vocabularies necessary for their understanding.

But now I am not so sure that the problem I have in mind can be solved by courses, or possibly by any sort of conscious social program. I vividly recall my experience a few years ago when, asked to talk informally at a men’s dormitory at the University of Chicago, I chose the movies as my topic, and started to say some things about the contemporary tendency among educated Americans to regard the movies as “just a show,” to be “taken in” when one has nothing better at hand. I was talking to an audience most of whom devoutly believed that Hollywood movies other than Chaplin and the early Griffith are without exception junk, and that only England, France, and Italy make movies seriously worth seeing. I was trying to rebut this prejudice by saying something about the differing film conventions on the Continent and in this country: how, for example, we had had a convention of a happy ending which our more arty directors were now tending to exchange for an equally conventional, though Continental, unhappy ending, and that no necessary superiority lay in one convention rather than another, any more than in one sonnet form rather than another. Likewise, I sought to show how the undoubted inanities of the Production Code often resulted in a movie treatment — the so-called Lubitsch touch, for instance — which was a creative surmounting of the constricting forms. And then suddenly I stopped in the middle of my lecture, and for a while could not continue.

For I had realized, as I looked at the intent faces of the students, that I

might well be engaged in closing off one of the few casual and free escape routes remaining to them; that I might be helping to inaugurate a new convention: namely, that one had not only to attend Hollywood movies but to understand and appreciate them. I might be imposing on a group of students already zealously engaged in self-improvement, in social and intellectual mobility, still another requirement — and this in the very act of seeking to liberate them from a common prejudice against American movies. I could continue my lecture only after I had made some of these misgivings explicit, and had indicated that I came to offer some of them an opportunity, not another extra-curricular curriculum.

I realized the problem here was not so much *mine* of becoming a possible taste-leader, as it was one for the students who were looking for such leadership, if not from me, then from somebody. Contrary to the situation in my own undergraduate days, when we were, at least for external consumption, stoutly individualistic, these students were more malleable, more ready to be told. One reason for this is that the general level of teaching has improved, despite all the attacks currently being made against our educational system. Not only has the teaching improved, but the teachers have changed their pace and style; we try to get close to our students, to be good group leaders rather than platform ham actors, and to concern ourselves with more aspects of student life than simply classroom performance. We are perhaps today less distant from the student than we once were, both in terms of social class position and in terms of intellectual attitude. Involved in these institutional changes are psychological ones, some of which my collaborators and I have sought to describe in *The Lonely Crowd*—changes which have led to the spread of a character type I have termed “other-directed,” a type guided by the ever-shifting judgments of significant people within one’s purview at any given moment, as against the older type, the “inner-directed,” more steadily although not necessarily more nobly guided by the internalized voices of ancestors. The students I was talking to, being in the main other-directed, were ready to shift their leisure behavior at a moment’s notice; they had learned to do so in playing the popularity game which starts in kindergarten or shortly thereafter. I could envisage a group of them going to a Sam Goldwyn movie and, coming out, being very self-conscious as to how they ought to respond to it, whereas earlier they would have gone to it with the excuse that they needed to relax a bit before hitting the books again. Since so much of their leisure was already highly self-conscious, I hesitated to add to the burden. All planning for other people’s leisure has to face this fundamental ambiguity, a form of

the ever-present problem of the unintended consequence.

To be sure, leisure is a burden of the sort I am describing only among the educated, among the great many high school and college graduates who have some aspirations towards culture; men and women who, in the absence of any visible aristocratic model of leisure in American life, look to their fellows for clues, look to the magazines and the press, and the "how to" books. For the working class, there is leisure now too, and often money to spend, but it is not usually a burden, not perhaps a burden enough. Hunting and fishing and bowling; puttering about the house, garden, or car; watching television with and without discrimination; playing the numbers — these are recreations, not so very different from those turned up by Rowntree and Lavers in England, which my students have observed among steelworkers in Hammond and Gary. To be sure, there is considerable aspiration towards improved taste on the part of some of the younger wives, who read the women's service magazines. And the unions make sporadic efforts to give political education to the men; you will hardly be surprised to hear that some of the leaders blame the mass media for seducing the rank and file away from meetings — a charge which Mark Starr, educational director of the Ladies Garment Workers' Union, leveled at David Sarnoff of NBC at the Corning Roundtable. I think that charge is quite unjust, for I see no reason why people should spend their leisure in political activity unless that is their form of sport and they enjoy it, save in those cases where conditions are really so terrible that every good man has to come to the aid of the party — and, contrary to what is so widely urged, I believe such conditions are rare in this country.

One reason the steel workers have so few problems with their leisure is that their work today is itself often quite leisurely and gregarious. It was not like that even thirty years ago when, as we know, there were ten- and twelve-hour shifts, and when the work was so hot and heavy that many men, on returning home, lay exhausted on the kitchen floor before they could get the energy to eat, and tumble into bed. Now at the big sheet and tube mill in Gary the men often take naps on mattresses they have brought in, and cook meals on burners attached to the fiery furnaces; if a new foreman doesn't like the practice, production is slowed down until he does like it. Think here, too, of the extent to which the schools train young people in this kind of comradely slow-down against the teachers and against the system generally, so that I sometimes think of school teachers as foremen who conspire with their pupils, the workers, to conceal the true state of affairs from top management, the

principals, and from the parents who are the absentee stockholders, who grouse now and again about their dividends. At any rate, since work has now become so relatively lacking in strain — though it is not nearly so routinized in feeling as it may seem to be to observers of factory life — the worker leaves the plant with a good deal of energy left, which carries him readily through his leisure hours.

By contrast, the professional and business person is apt to leave his work with a good many tensions created by his reactions to interpersonal situations and as a result his leisure “needs” may have to be satisfied before he can rise above the level of needs — before he can rise from the level of re-creation to the level of creation. But it is just this very person on whom fall most of the demands for participative, active, constructive leisure which we have been examining earlier; and he may move from a job, where he is constantly faced with others and their expectations, to leisure pursuits, again in the company of others, where workmanlike performance is also expected of him. While he may nominally have a short work-week — though in many middle-class occupations such as medicine and teaching, hours are as long or longer than ever — he has not got much time which is not filled with stress. As my colleague Nelson Foote likes to put it, he has very little reverie as a balance to his sociability.

III

Let us look at a concrete example. A friend and former colleague, Professor John R. Seeley, is now engaged in directing a large research project on the relations between school and community in a wealthy, upper-middle-class suburb. It is a suburb which has one of the finest public school systems on this continent, one which is often held up as a model to others; in fact, the magnificent new modern high school dominates the community, even physically, as the cathedrals did in the Middle Ages. The very fact that this elaborate research is going on there — it is to take a period of at least five years before any final conclusions are reached — is indicative of the alertness of the school officials, the school board, and the other community leaders. Yet, from my own very limited observation and from what has been reported to me, it is plain that the community, despite all material advantages, is not happy. The parents have neuroses; the children have allergies; and the teachers — well, I don’t know. What has gone wrong?

If we follow the life of the children after school, we can perhaps get

some clues. They are being prepared now for their later careers and their later rather hypothetical leisure. Their parents want to know how they have fared at school: they are constantly comparing them, judging them in school aptitude, popularity, what part they have in the school play; are the boys sissies? the girls too fat? All the school anxieties are transferred to the home and vice versa, partly because the parents, college graduates mostly, are intelligent and concerned with education. After school there are music lessons, skating lessons, riding lessons, with mother as chauffeur and scheduler. In the evening, the children go to a dance at school for which the parents have groomed them, while the parents go to a PTA meeting for which the children, directly or indirectly, have groomed *them*, where they are addressed by a psychiatrist who advises them to be warm and relaxed in handling their children! They go home and eagerly and warmly ask their returning children to tell them everything that happened at the dance, making it clear by their manner that they are sophisticated and cannot easily be shocked. As Professor Seeley describes matters, the school in this community operates a “gigantic factory for the production of relationships.”

Since, moreover, the same interpersonal concerns dominate life within this “plant” and outside it, there is no sharp change of pace between work and play, between school and home activities. The children and their mothers — the fathers who work in the city at least make a geographical shift and also something of an emotional one — are characterized by a pervading anxiety. This is connected, I think, with the fact that the older, clear goals of achievement have been called into question, and these family units must decide not only how to get what they want but also what it is they should want. To answer this question, the community makes much use of professionals — the school principals and teachers themselves, who have a very high standing; child guidance experts and mental hygienists; and the packaged professionalism which can be bought in books or over the radio. The result is a well-known paradox: here is a suburb devoted to the arts of consumption and leisure, where these arts are pursued with such dogged determination that leisureliness as a quality of life is very largely absent. While all the appurtenances of variety are present, life is monotonous in the sense that it is steadily gregarious, focussed on others, and on the self in relation to others. As I have observed among some students, at Harvard and elsewhere, even casualness can be an effortful artifact.

IV

Yet it is all too easy to deride these parents and children and assorted experts, to urge them — as some people are now doing in the anti-progressive education movement — to drop all this new-fangled nonsense and get back to hard work and traditional curricula and nineteenth-century or classical “values” generally. It is perhaps not surprising that both aristocratic and working-class stances towards leisure combine in this derision. When, for example, this suburban community was recently discussed in my seminar on leisure, many people, both faculty and students, took the position that what these suburbanites needed was more direct and uninhibited aggression, more toughness and less talkiness. They compared the community unfavorably to a working-class community where, for reasons I indicated a moment ago, leisure is undoubtedly more casually dealt with. What they admired was aristocratic or artisan insouciance, as against upper-middle-class anxiety and preoccupation. Yet I do not know by what standard of value one prefers a broken nose to asthma, or lumbago or gout to ulcers. There is no doubt that the suburb in question, and others like it, is anxious and vulnerable, individually and collectively; otherwise, it would not be quite so receptive to a team of researchers. But I think that overadmiration for toughness is part of a romance which the middle class, in Europe as well as in America, has been carrying on with the lower class for a good many years now. Like the romance which many anthropologists have been carrying on with preliterate tribes, or many historians and philosophers and literary men with the Middle Ages, it narrows our sympathy for the problems of contemporary life and our awareness of the values which may, underneath anxiety and awkwardness, currently be emerging in it.

Thus, I think we can look at the people of this suburb rather differently from the way I have been doing so far, or from the way my seminar reacted to them. We can see them, for one thing, as explorers. Whereas the explorers of the last century moved to the frontiers of production and opened fisheries, mines, and mills, the explorers of this century seem to me increasingly to be moving to the frontiers of consumption. They are opening up new forms of interpersonal understanding, new ways of using the home as a “plant” for leisure, new ways of using the school as a kind of community center, as the chapel of a secular religion perhaps. But frontier towns are not usually very attractive. And frontier behavior is awkward: people have not yet learned to behave comfortably in the new surroundings. There is formlessness, which takes the shape of lawless-

ness on the frontier of production and of aimlessness on the frontier of consumption. In both instances, the solid citizens who stayed home are likely to feel superior, both to the formlessness and to whatever may be emerging from it, just as most Europeans of the educated strata have felt superior to most aspects of America throughout most of our history. The move to the suburb, as it occurs in contemporary America, is emotionally, if not geographically, something almost unprecedented historically; and those who move to any new frontier are likely to pay a price, in loneliness and discomfort. When the physical hardships are great, as they were for earlier generations of pioneers, the psychological hardships may be repressed or submerged — though we cannot be too sure even of that, for, as Oscar Handlin makes clear in his book on immigration to America, *The Uprooted*, the most devastating strains on the newcomers were in fact the emotional ones, rough though the physical conditions were.

To carry my analogy further, I do believe that discoveries are being made on the frontiers of consumption. Take the American diet, for instance. Once upon a time, and still in many quarters, this was in charge of the nutritionists, the exponents of a balanced meal, adequate caloric intake and colonic outlet, and plenty of vitamins. These good people bore the same relation to food that recreationists do to leisure: they want it to be uplifting, salubrious, wasteless. But now, among the better income strata at any rate, their work is done: it is incorporated into the formulae of bakers, into the inventories of chainstores, the menus of restaurants and dining cars. We have, as I sometimes like to put it, moved from the wheat bowl to the salad bowl. In consequence, in the suburb I have been describing, and elsewhere throughout the country, there is an emphasis, which was once confined to small sophisticated or expatriate circles, on having the right responses to food, on being a gourmet. Save for a few cranks, the housewives are not concerned with having enough wheat-germ, but with having enough oregano, or the right wine — and more than that, with having the right enjoyment of the wine. In the middle of the shopping center in this suburb is a store which stocks a stupendous array of delicacies, spices, patisseries, delicatessens, and European gadgets for cooking; the casserole is replacing the melting pot!

Now, as I have indicated, the residents of this suburb are anxious about food and their attitudes towards it. They want to be knowledgeable about it and also to enjoy it, but they are not yet easygoing in the matter. Among men particularly, the demand that one must enjoy food, and not simply stow it away, is relatively new, and again these pioneers are awkwardly self-conscious. (Let me make clear in passing that I am not talk-

ing about old-fashioned conspicuous consumption. I am not talking about the hostess's fear of making a gastronomic faux pas, or fear that her children's table manners will disgrace her; no doubt these fears may still exist, although greatly muted, in the group I am describing. No, these parents are afraid that they are missing some taste experience, which in turn reveals the lack of a basic personality attribute.) We are observing these families, it appears, in a time of transition, when they have left old food conventions behind and are exploring, without settling on, new ones. They are, in effect, paying the society's costs of research and development.

And can there be any doubt but that the result will be — in fact, has already been — an addition to the stock of American leisure bounties and benefits? The self-service supermarket, with its abundance of foods capably displayed, where the shopper's caprice and imagination can roam without interference from officious clerks or sabotage from indifferent ones, seems to me as significant an invention on the side of consumption as the assembly-line on the side of production. But the invention would be meaningless without a "labor force," without a group of experimentalist families prepared to develop new casuistries of food, new combinations of color and taste. And here enters still another service industry: the cookbook and recipe industry, which has ransacked the world's cuisines and produced a host of books and newspaper columns, as well as those restaurants which serve as pilot plants. I think there can be no doubt that the children of the children now growing up in our demonstration suburb will be reasonably free of fears, guilts, and awkwardness about food prepared as a matter of course for the pursuit of happiness in this area of existence. In fact, I see only one caveat: the return of the nutritionist ghost in the craze for reducing, which makes not only women but men choose between food and figure, with one eye on mortality tables and the other on the way one appears in the hall of mirrors which is society. Even so, the reduced diets on which these figure-chasers bravely live are, item for item, unquestionably superior to anything known before in the American provender — which a generation ago made our food, like our bootlegging, an international joke. Moreover, the cult of one's figure, as of one's dress and one's coiffure, is certainly not an illegitimate one for one's happiness and aesthetic sense.

I could, if there were space, go through a number of areas of current pioneering in leisure — in the fields of music, painting, and literature; in the whole subtle field of sociability and conversation; in sports; in the changing style of vacations — and show how the pioneers are paying in financial and emotional outlay, and particularly in anxiety, the exploita-

tion costs of their discoveries — without, however, the offset of the depletion allowance which the federal government allows to the wildcatters for oil and gas. I have already raised the question of whether our intellectual and literary culture is not too severe and derisive about the middle-class vice of anxiousness, compared with its benign tolerance for the aristocratic and lower-class vices of brutality and indifference. Such very general questions of value judgment are of great importance in determining contemporary attitudes towards leisure. I think, for example, that we make life and leisure harder for the already anxious person — whose anxiety is in fact thoroughly understandable in the light of our discussion so far — by making him also anxious about his anxiety, so that we heap on him a cumulative burden. Like the college student who came to see me not long ago, worried because she has a few of the sexual inhibitions she would have been worried about not having a generation ago, teachers also feel it compulsory not to be anxious, but to be always easygoing, warm, and relaxed — what a burden this puts on teachers in the better public and private schools! — whereas lack of discipline and firmness would have worried teachers in an earlier day. I am inclined to think we should form a union of the anxious ones, to defend our right to be anxious, our right to be tense, our right to aspirin and to our allergies. I was shocked when one of my colleagues remarked, after our seminar had had a description of life in the suburb I have here used as a case, that children were worse off there than they had been under the *ancien régime*. Historical amnesia had blinded him, as it blinds many now-fashionable critics of progressive education, to the brutalities and savageries in the treatment of children a hundred years or so ago. Then children were harnessed to the engine of society with often little concern for their own development. Many were too frightened or too cowed to be anxious; anxiety is on the whole a luxury and a sign of luxury. I urged my condescending colleague to read some nineteenth-century memoirs, to read *Father and Son*, Edmund Gosse's recollection of his awed and prayer-filled but rarely playful childhood; to read *The Way of All Flesh*, or Dickens, or the reports of health commissioners. I have myself no doubt that the work of such reformers as Ellen Key ("The Century of the Child"), Lucy Sprague Mitchell, and of course John Dewey, has been a very great advance.

V

But at the same time, I think one implication of all I have had to say so far

is that every social advance is ambivalent in its consequences. I have stressed as much as I have the conflicts in our attitudes towards the proper use of leisure, and the kind of training children should get with their later lives of leisure in mind, because I feel that a recognition of ambiguity at the very heart of our problem is a first step towards perspective and a certain necessary detachment. I can't emphasize enough how rapidly our country is changing, and how hard it is even for the wisest among us to grasp what is going on.

Let me give just two illustrations; I am sure there are others. Recently a friend of mine who works for one of the pocket book companies visited an Ohio Valley city of about 75,000. There is no bookstore in the town, but a few books are kept, along with stationery and oddments, in the main department store. My friend asked at the department store why they didn't put in a real bookstore, and was told, "Well, this is a steel town. People here don't read; they just look at television or go to the taverns." Yet over three-quarters of a million pocket books were sold in this same town in 1951 at restaurants, at newsstands, and in drugstores, many of them in the Mentor line of modern classics. This is well over a book a month for those old enough to read. I wish we had some knowledge and understanding of what these citizens made out of all they read: the Faulkner novels, the Conant *On Understanding Science*, the Ruth Benedict *Patterns of Culture*, along with the Mickey Spillane and other mixtures of sadism with sex. But studies of this kind in the field of leisure have not yet been made, as far as I know.

I draw my other illustration of the laggard state of our knowledge even of the basic data from an article by Gian-Carlo Menotti which appeared in a recent issue of the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*. As you know, Menotti is a gifted and widely hailed young composer who, after some twenty years' residence here, considers himself an American. He was complaining about the precarious position of the creative artist in American life, particularly in the field of music. There, he points out, we bestow all our adulation on the performer: the glamorous conductor or singer, the Menuhin or Serkin or Reginald Kell, who interprets music but does not create it, while the modern composer, unless he writes for the movies or gets some help from a foundation or a rich wife, will starve (as Béla Bartók did) — and is certainly not in any case featured in the billing along with the star performers. And he goes on to say that many parents in America are ashamed if their sons choose an artistic career; not only do they fear they will not make a living — even if they (the parents) could afford to support them — but fear, too, that they will be sissies; fathers try

to force their sons to become businessmen or doctors or something else equally reassuring. Now I am sure that Menotti has a very good case about the plight of the composer, who seems so much worse off than the painter or writer, having more impresarios standing between him and his public. However, it seems to me that Menotti does not take account of the rapid and widespread change which has been going on in just the attitudes he is attacking. Through amateur chamber music groups and through the fabulous growth of the long-playing record industry, many thousands of Americans are today discovering modern music with a rush, just as they are discovering wine and other pleasures that were once confined to a small cultivated indigenous group and a somewhat larger group of immigrants who brought this culture with them from the old country. Likewise, it seems to me unlikely that millions of middle-class parents would not in 1952 be pleased if their sons exhibited artistic gifts and interests, even if not commercially promising. Many businessman fathers want their sons to be anything but businessmen, and in some circles it is business that is unduly looked down upon today, not art. When I said as much, however, at the Corning Conference, Miss Rama Rau and others said I was mistaken: parents would accept art only if it was advertised in *Life* magazine. But Millard Sheets, the painter, pointed out that the third highest group of students under the GI bill studied art. I would be greatly interested in comments on this topic, for I feel that here again we simply do not know.

VI

So far we have been looking at our culture from inside. We have asked ourselves some questions about what is going on, about what attitudes are prevalent towards it, what models of competent use of leisure exist, what differences there are among different social strata, and so on. But there is another way of going at our problem which is to ask, not what play and leisure are like, or were like, in our culture but what they are like in any culture. Is there, for instance, any natural or biological basis for leisure or is it entirely conventional? *Homo Ludens*, a book by the late Dutch scholar Huizinga, offers some interesting clues to this. Huizinga points out that every language he examined had a word for play which is different from the word for work, and that many cultures have a pattern of sport, of noneconomic serious and yet playful competition. Many if not all cultures, moreover, operate on a periodic or seasonal rhythm between heavy work and heavy play — and I might add that many soci-

eties also have feasts even if they do not suffer from famines. That there is a cross-cultural solidarity of play may be indicated by a well-known example. Our Army advised soldiers and aviators to always carry a piece of string with them and when downed in a Pacific jungle to start playing cat's cradle if a suspicious native approached; the native would sometimes start to play, too.

All this must rest on something basic in the biological substratum of man and many animals. We know of course that children play even without instruction, provided certain basic minima of security are met. Thus, while children's play has aspects of artifice which the ever-renewed child's culture elaborates, much of it is simply given. In fact, work and play are not yet, for the child, independently organized; and what he makes of play as he develops depends to a very considerable extent on the society's interpretation of his play — is it regarded as "child's play," as useless, as preparation for life, or is it disregarded?

I think we can say, indeed, that the child's play serves as the principal model for all later efforts to free leisure time from its burdens and to cope with its puzzling ambiguities. We all of us know, if we think about it, that children's play is by no means always free and spontaneous; it is often filled with terror and morbidity; but at its best it is surely one of the unequivocally good things of this earth, and no wonder we try to recapture it as *Paradise Lost*. But if we look closely at children's play we can observe something else which may even give us a clue as to how that recapture can, in part, be achieved, namely that the child's greatest satisfaction appears to arise from experiences of mastery and control. As Erik H. Erikson has noted in imaginative detail, the developing body itself provides a graded set of experiences; anyone can observe this who watches children play with their new-found mastery of walking or running or talking or diving. Play seems to reside in a margin, often a narrow one, between tasks which are too demanding, and those which are not demanding enough to require the excited concentration of good play. A child or adult who is simply going through the motions is not engaged in play or leisure as we have been talking about it here, however the society may define it. But without some social forms for leisure and play, forms which have to be broken through, yet have to be there to be broken through, I do not think we will have much play either. For the demand that play be constantly spontaneous, unchanneled by social forms, is too overwhelming; spontaneity, as we have already seen, is lost if we strive too hard for it. Thus, play would seem to consist in part of giving ourselves tasks, useless in any immediate sense, which challenge us but do

not overwhelm us — tasks which allow us to practice our skills on the universe when not too much is at stake. Some of us, who lose this ability in our waking lives, retain it (as Erich Fromm points out in *The Forgotten Language*) in our dreams, which can be astonishingly witty, brilliant, and artistic — an indication, perhaps, of the child still buried within us, not so much in Freud's sense of the vicious child but rather of the child natively gifted with the capacity for imaginative play.

I have spoken of mastery of tasks, but I do not want to be understood as implying that this necessarily means physical activity — that is only one example. The child in the front of a subway train who intently watches the motorman, the signals, and the tracks may be quiet, but is undoubtedly playing, and may be playing very well — a point Reuel Denney eloquently voiced at the Corning Conference. When we speak of “role-playing,” we should have something of this sort of vicariousness in mind. And this leads me to the complicating point that many of our workaday tasks as adults can be handled with a certain quality of leisure if we are able to regard work as a series of challenging tasks to be mastered, where the net of expectations surrounding us is at the same time not too frightening. On the other hand, we can be playful at work as a way of *evading* demands, sometimes by being one of the boys, pretending to ourselves and others that, if we really worked, we would get to the top. Students often play such games with themselves. But this is not really carrying out in adult life the effort at competence which is our lesson learned from the play of the child. That requires that we work at the top of our bent, while at the same time enjoying the very processes of accomplishment — enjoying our awareness, for example, of all that is going on in a classroom; enjoying our understanding of a technical problem; enjoying ourselves, in other words, as functioning and effective human beings.

We get here, it is apparent, into very deep waters indeed, where the boundaries between work and play become shadowy — as I think, for other reasons, they are tending to become in our society anyway — waters where we are looking for a quality we can only vaguely describe: it is various and rhythmical; it breaks through social forms and as constantly recreates them; it manifests itself in tension, yet not too much of it; it is at once meaningful, in the sense of giving us intrinsic satisfaction, and meaningless, in the sense of having no pressing utilitarian purpose. It is some such model as this, I suggest, which haunts us when we consider leisure and judge its quality in ourselves and others. It is a model which has been elaborated in our culture, and yet which transcends culture.

Crime as an American Way of Life

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Volume 13, Number 2 Summer 1953

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In the 1890s, the Reverend Dr. Charles Parkhurst, shocked at the open police protection afforded New York's bordellos, demanded a state inquiry. In the Lexow investigation that followed, the young and dashing William Travers Jerome staged a set of public hearings that created sensation after sensation. He badgered "Clubber" Williams, First Inspector of the Police Department, to account for wealth and property far greater than could have been saved on his salary; it was earned, the Clubber explained laconically, through land speculation "in Japan." Heavy-set Captain Schmittberger, the "collector" for the "Tenderloin precincts" — Broadway's fabulous concentration of hotels, theaters, restaurants, gaming houses, and saloons — related in detail how protection money was distributed among the police force. Crooks, policemen, public officials, businessmen, all paraded across the stage, each adding his chapter to a sordid story of corruption and crime. The upshot of these revelations was reform — the election of William L. Strong, a stalwart businessman, as mayor, and the naming of Theodore Roosevelt as police commissioner.

It did not last, of course, just as previous reform victories had not lasted. Yet the ritual drama was reenacted. Twenty years ago the Seabury investigation in New York uncovered the tin-box brigade and the thirty-

three little MacQuades. Jimmy Walker was ousted as mayor and in came Fiorello La Guardia. Tom Dewey became district attorney, broke the industrial rackets, sent Lucky Luciano to jail, and went to the governor's chair in Albany. Then reform was again swallowed up in the insatiable maw of corruption until Kefauver and the young and dashing Rudolph Halley threw a new beam of light into the seemingly bottomless pit.

How explain this repetitious cycle? Obviously the simple moralistic distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys," so deep at the root of the reform impulse, bears little relation to the role of organized crime in American society. What, then, does?

II

Americans have had an extraordinary talent for compromise in politics and extremism in morality. The most shameless political deals (and "steals") have been rationalized as expedient and realistically necessary. Yet in no other country have there been such spectacular attempts to curb human appetites and brand them as illicit, and nowhere else such glaring failures. From the start America was at one and the same time a frontier community where "everything goes" and the fair country of the Blue Laws. At the turn of the century the cleavage developed between the Big City and the small-town conscience. Crime as a growing business was fed by the revenues from prostitution, liquor, and gambling that a wide-open urban society encouraged and which a middle-class Protestant ethos tried to suppress with a ferocity unmatched in any other civilized country. Catholic cultures rarely have imposed such restrictions, and have rarely suffered such excesses. Even in prim and proper Anglican England, prostitution is a commonplace of Piccadilly night life, and gambling one of the largest and most popular industries. In America the enforcement of public morals has been a continuing feature of our history.

Some truth may lie in Svend Ranulf's generalization that moral indignation is a peculiar fact of middle-class psychology and represents a disguised form of repressed envy. The larger truth lies perhaps in the brawling nature of American development and the social character of crime. Crime, in many ways, is a Coney Island mirror, caricaturing the morals and manners of a society. The jungle quality of the American business community, particularly at the turn of the century, was reflected in the mode of "business" practiced by the coarse gangster elements, most of them from new immigrant families, who were "getting ahead,"

just as Horatio Alger had urged. In the older, Protestant tradition the intense acquisitiveness, such as that of Daniel Drew, was rationalized by a compulsive moral fervor. But the formal obeisance of the ruthless businessman in the workaday world to the church-going pieties of the Sabbath was one that the gangster could not make. Moreover, for the young criminal, hunting in the asphalt jungle of the crowded city, it was not the businessman with his wily manipulation of numbers but the “man with the gun” who was the American hero. “No amount of commercial prosperity,” once wrote Teddy Roosevelt, “can supply the lack of the heroic virtues.” The American was “the hunter, cowboy, frontiersman, the soldier, the naval hero.” And in the crowded slums, the gangster. He was a man with a gun, acquiring by personal merit what was denied to him by complex orderings of a stratified society. And the duel with the law was the morality play par excellence: the gangster, with whom rides our own illicit desires, and the prosecutor, representing final judgment and the force of the law.

Yet all this was acted out in a wider context. The desires satisfied in extra-legal fashion were more than a hunger for the “forbidden fruits” of conventional morality. They also involved, in the complex and ever shifting structure of group, class, and ethnic stratification, which is the warp and woof of America’s “open” society, such “normal” goals as independence through a business of one’s own, and such “moral” aspirations as the desire for social advancement and social prestige. For crime, in the language of the sociologists, has a “functional” role in the society, and the urban rackets — the illicit activity organized for continuing profit rather than individual illegal acts — is one of the queer ladders of social mobility in American life. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the whole question of organized crime in America cannot be understood unless one appreciates (1) the distinctive role of organized gambling as a function of a mass consumption economy; (2) the specific role of various immigrant groups as they one after another became involved in marginal business and crime; and (3) the relation of crime to the changing character of the urban political machines.

III

As a society changes, so does, in lagging fashion, its type of crime. As American society became more “organized,” as the American businessman became more “civilized” and less “buccaneering,” so did the American racketeer. And just as there were important changes in the

structure of business enterprise, so the “institutionalized” criminal enterprise was transformed too.

In the America of the last fifty years the main drift of society has been towards the rationalization of industry, the domestication of the crude self-made captain of industry into the respectable man of manners, and the emergence of a mass-consumption economy. The most significant transformation in the field of “institutionalized” crime was the increasing relative importance of gambling as against other kinds of illegal activity. And, as a multi-billion-dollar business, gambling underwent a transition parallel to the changes in American enterprise as a whole. This parallel was exemplified in many ways: in gambling’s industrial organization (e.g., the growth of a complex technology such as the national racing wire service and the minimization of risks by such techniques as lay-off betting); in its respectability, as was evidenced in the opening of smart and popular gambling casinos in resort towns and in “satellite” adjuncts to metropolitan areas; in its functional role in a mass-consumption economy (for sheer volume of money changing hands, nothing has ever surpassed this feverish activity of fifty million American adults); in the social acceptance of the gamblers in the important status world of sport and entertainment, i.e., “café society.”

In seeking to “legitimize” itself, gambling had quite often actually become a force against older and more vicious forms of illegal activity. In 1946, for example, when a Chicago mobster, Pat Manno, went down to Dallas, Texas, to take over gambling in the area for the Accardo-Guzik combine, he reassured the sheriff as to his intent as follows: “Something I’m against, that’s dope peddlers, pickpockets, hired killers. That’s one thing I can’t stomach, and that’s one thing the fellows up there — the group won’t stand for, things like that. They discourage it, they even go to headquarters and ask them why they don’t do something about it.”

Jimmy Cannon once reported that when the gambling raids started in Chicago, the “combine” protested that, in upsetting existing stable relations, the police were only opening the way for ambitious young punks and hoodlums to start trouble. Nor is there today, as there was twenty or even forty years ago, prostitution of major organized scope in the United States. Aside from the fact that manners and morals have changed, prostitution *as an industry* doesn’t pay as well as gambling. Besides, its existence threatened the tacit moral acceptance and quasi-respectability that gamblers and gambling have secured in the American way of life. It was, as any operator in the field might tell you, “bad for business.”

The criminal world of the last decade, its tone set by the captains of the gambling industry, is in startling contrast to the state of affairs in the two decades before. If a Kefauver report had been written then, the main “names” would have been Lepke and Gurrah, Dutch Schultz, Jack “Legs” Diamond, Lucky Luciano, and, reaching back a little further, Arnold Rothstein, the czar of the underworld. These men (with the exception of Luciano, who was involved in narcotics and prostitution) were in the main industrial racketeers. Rothstein, it is true, had a larger function: he was, as Frank Costello became later, the financier of the underworld—the pioneer big businessman of crime, who, understanding the logic of coordination, sought to *organize* crime as a source of regular income. His main interest in this direction was in industrial racketeering, and his entry was through labor disputes. At one time, employers in the garment trades hired Legs Diamond and his sluggers to break strikes, and the Communists, then in control of the cloakmakers union, hired one Little Orgie to protect the pickets and beat up the scabs; only later did both sides learn that Legs Diamond and Little Orgie were working for the same man, Rothstein.

Rothstein’s chief successors, Lepke Buchalter and Gurrah Shapiro, were able, in the early ’30s, to dominate sections of the men’s and women’s clothing industries, of painting, fur dressing, flour trucking, and other fields. In a highly chaotic and cut-throat industry such as clothing, the racketeer, paradoxically, played a stabilizing role by regulating competition and fixing prices. When the NRA came in and assumed this function, the businessman found that what had once been a quasi-economic service was now pure extortion, and he began to demand police action. In other types of racketeering, such as the trucking of perishable foods and waterfront loading, where the racketeers entrenched themselves as middlemen—taking up, by default, a service that neither shippers nor truckers wanted to assume—a pattern of accommodation was roughly worked out and the rackets assumed a quasi-legal veneer. On the waterfront, old-time racketeers performed the necessary function of loading—but at an exorbitant price, and this monopoly was recognized by both the union and the shippers, and tacitly by government. (See my case study “The Last of the Business Rackets,” in the June 1951 issue of *Fortune*.)

But in the last decade and a half, industrial racketeering has not offered much in the way of opportunity. *Like American capitalism itself, crime shifted its emphasis from production to consumption.* The focus of crime became the direct exploitation of the citizen as consumer, largely

through gambling. And while the protection of these huge revenues was inextricably linked to politics, the relation between gambling and "the mobs" became more complicated.

IV

Although it never showed up in the gross national product, gambling in the last decade was one of the largest industries in the United States. The Kefauver Committee estimated it as a twenty-billion-dollar business. This figure has been picked up and widely quoted, but in truth no one knows what the gambling "turnover" and "take" actually is, nor how much is bet legally (*pari-mutuel*, etc.) and how much illegally. In fact, the figure cited by the committee was arbitrary and arrived at quite sloppily. As one staff member said: "We had no real idea of the money spent. . . . The California crime commission said twelve billion. Virgil Peterson of Chicago estimated thirty billion. We picked twenty billion as a balance between the two."

If comprehensive data are not available, we do know, from specific instances, the magnitude of many of the operations. Some indications can be seen from these items culled at random:

— James Carroll and the M & G syndicate did a 20-million-dollar annual business in St. Louis. This was one of the two large books in the city.

— The S & G syndicate in Miami did a 26-million-dollar volume yearly; the total for all books in the Florida resort reached 40 millions.

— Slot machines were present in 69,786 establishments in 1951 (each paid \$100 for a license to the Bureau of Internal Revenue); the usual average is three machines to a license, which would add up to 210,000 slot machines in operation in the United States. In legalized areas, where the betting is higher and more regular, the average gross "take" per machine is \$50 a week.

— The largest policy wheel (i.e. "numbers") in Chicago's "Black Belt" reported taxable net profits for the four-year period from 1946 through 1949, after sizable deductions for "overhead," of \$3,656,968. One of the large "white" wheels reported in 1947 a gross income of \$2,317,000 and a net profit of \$205,000. One CIO official estimated that perhaps 15 percent of his union's lower echelon officials are involved in the numbers racket (a steward, free to roam a plant, is in a perfect situation for organizing bets).

If one considers the amount of betting on sports alone — an estimated six billion on baseball, a billion on football pools, another billion on basketball, six billion on horse racing — then Elmo Roper's judgment that "only the food, steel, auto, chemical, and machine-tool industries have a greater volume of business" does not seem too farfetched.

While gambling has long flourished in the United States, the influx of the big mobsters into the industry — and its expansion — started in the '30s when repeal of Prohibition forced them to look about for new avenues of enterprise. Gambling, which had begun to flower under the nourishment of rising incomes, was the most lucrative field in sight. To a large extent the shift from bootlegging to gambling was a mere transfer of business operations. In the East, Frank Costello went into slot machines and the operation of a number of ritzy gambling casinos. He also became the "banker" for the Erickson "book," which "laid off" bets for other bookies. Joe Adonis, similarly, opened up a number of casinos, principally in New Jersey. Across the country, many other mobsters went into bookmaking. As other rackets diminished, and gambling, particularly horse-race betting, flourished in the '40s, a struggle erupted over the control of racing information.

Horse-race betting requires a peculiar industrial organization. The essential component is time. A bookie can operate only if he can get information on odds up to the very last minute before the race, so that he can "hedge" or "lay-off" bets. With racing going on simultaneously on many tracks throughout the country, this information has to be obtained speedily and accurately. Thus, the racing wire is the nerve ganglion of race betting.

The racing-wire news service got started in the '20s through the genius of the late Moe Annenberg, who had made a fearful reputation for himself as Hearst's circulation manager in the rough-and-tumble Chicago newspaper wars. Annenberg conceived the idea of a telegraphic news service which would gather information from tracks and shoot it immediately to scratch sheets, horse parlors, and bookie joints. In some instances, track owners gave Annenberg the rights to send news from tracks; more often, the news was simply "stolen" by crews operating inside or near the tracks. So efficient did this news distribution system become, that in 1942, when a plane knocked out a vital telegraph circuit, which served an Air Force field as well as the gamblers, the Continental Press managed to get its racing wire service for gamblers resumed in fifteen minutes, while it took the Fourth Army, which was responsible for the defense of the entire West Coast, something like three hours.

Annenberg built up a nationwide racing information chain that not only distributed wire news but controlled sub-outlets as well. In 1939, harassed by the Internal Revenue Bureau on income tax, and chivvied by the Justice Department for "monopolistic" control of the wire service, the tired and aging Annenberg simply walked out of the business. He did not sell his interest, or even seek to salvage some profit; he simply gave up. Yet, like any established and thriving institution, the enterprise continued, though on a decentralized basis. James Ragen, Annenberg's operations manager, and likewise a veteran of the old Chicago circulation wars, took over the national wire service through a dummy friend and renamed it the Continental Press Service.

The salient fact is that in the operation of the Annenberg and Ragen wire service, formally illegal as many of its subsidiary operations may have been (i.e. in "stealing" news, supplying information to bookies, etc.), gangsters played no part. It was a business, illicit, true, but primarily a business. The distinction between gamblers and gangsters, as we shall see, is a relevant one.

In 1946, the Chicago mob, whose main interest was in bookmaking rather than gambling casinos, began to move in on the wire monopoly. Following repeal, the Capone lieutenants had turned, like Lepke, to labor racketeering. Murray ("The Camel") Humphries muscled in on the teamsters, the operating engineers, and the cleaning-and-dyeing, laundry, and linen-supply industries. Through a small-time punk, Willie Bioff, and union official George Browne, Capone's chief successors, Frank ("The Enforcer") Nitti and Paul Ricca, came into control of the motion-picture union and proceeded to shake down the movie industry for fabulous sums in order to "avert strikes." In 1943, when the government moved in and smashed the industrial rackets, the remaining big shots, Charley Fischetti, Jake Guzik, and Tony Accardo, decided to concentrate on gambling, and in particular began a drive to take over the racing wire.

In Chicago, the Guzik-Accardo gang, controlling a sub-distributor of the racing news service, began tapping Continental's wires. In Los Angeles, the head of the local distribution agency for Continental was beaten up by hoodlums working for Mickey Cohen and Joe Sica. Out of the blue appeared a new and competitive nationwide racing information and distribution service, known as Trans-American Publishing, the money for which was advanced by the Chicago mobs and Bugsy Siegel, who, at the time, held a monopoly of the bookmaking and wire-news service in Las Vegas. Many books pulled out of Continental and bought

information from the new outfit, many hedged by buying from both. At the end of a year, however, the Capone mob's wire had lost about \$200,000. Ragen felt that violence would erupt and went to the Cook County district attorney and told him that his life had been threatened by his rivals. Ragen knew his competitors. In June 1946 he was killed by a blast from a shotgun.

Thereafter the Capone mob abandoned Trans-American and got a "piece" of Continental. Through their new control of the national racing-wire monopoly, the Capone mob began to muscle in on the lucrative Miami gambling business run by the so-called S & G syndicate. For a long time S & G's monopoly over bookmaking had been so complete that when New York gambler Frank Erickson bought a three months' bookmaking concession at the expensive Roney Plaza Hotel, for \$45,000, the local police, in a highly publicized raid, swooped down on the hotel; the next year the Roney Plaza was again using local talent. The Capone group, however, was tougher. They demanded an interest in Miami bookmaking, and, when refused, began organizing a syndicate of their own, persuading some bookies at the big hotels to join them. Florida Governor Warren's crime investigator appeared — a friend, it seemed, of old Chicago dog-track operator William Johnston, who had contributed \$100,000 to the governor's campaign fund — and began raiding bookie joints, but only those that were affiliated with S & G. Then S & G, which had been buying its racing news from the local distributor of Continental Press, found its service abruptly shut off. For a few days the syndicate sought to bootleg information from New Orleans, but found itself limping along. After ten days' war of attrition, the five S & G partners found themselves with a sixth partner, who, for a token "investment" of \$20,000, entered a Miami business that grossed \$26,000,000 in one year.

V

While Americans made gambling illegal, they did not in their hearts think of it as wicked — even the churches benefited from the bingo and lottery crazes. So they gambled — and gamblers flourished. Against this open canvas, the indignant tones of Senator Wiley and the shocked righteousness of Senator Tobey during the Kefauver investigation rang oddly. Yet it was probably this very tone of surprise that gave the activity of the Kefauver Committee its piquant quality. Here were some senators who seemingly did not know the facts of life, as most Americans did. Here, in

the person of Senator Tobey, was the old New England Puritan conscience poking around in industrial America, in a world it had made but never seen. Here was old-fashioned moral indignation, at a time when cynicism was rampant in public life.

Commendable as such moralistic fervor was, it did not make for intelligent discrimination of fact. Throughout the Kefauver hearings, for example, there ran the presumption that all gamblers were invariably gangsters. This was true of Chicago's Accardo-Guzik combine, which in the past had its fingers in many kinds of rackets. It was not nearly so true of many of the large gamblers in America, most of whom had the feeling that they were satisfying a basic American urge for sport and looked upon their calling with no greater sense of guilt than did many bootleggers. After all, Sherman Billingsley did start out as a speakeasy proprietor, as did the Kreindlers of the "21" Club; and today the Stork Club and the former Jack and Charlie's are the most fashionable night and dining spots in America (one prominent patron of the Stork Club: J. Edgar Hoover).

The S & G syndicate in Miami, for example (led by Harold Salvey, Jules Levitt, Charles Friedman, Sam Cohen, and Edward "Eddie Luckey" Rosenbaum) was simply a master pool of some two hundred bookies that arranged for telephone service, handled "protection," acted as bankers for those who needed ready cash on hard-hit books, and, in short, functioned somewhat analogously to the large factoring corporations in the textile field or the credit companies in the auto industry. Yet to Kefauver, these S & G men were "slippery and arrogant characters. . . . Salvey, for instance, was an old-time bookie who told us he had done nothing except engage in bookmaking or finance other bookmakers for twenty years." When, as a result of committee publicity and the newly found purity of the Miami police, the S & G syndicate went out of business, it was, as the combine's lawyer told Kefauver, because the "boys" were weary of being painted "the worst monsters in the world." "It is true," Cohen acknowledged, "that they had been law violators." But they had never done anything worse than gambling, and "to fight the world isn't worth it."

Most intriguing of all were the opinions of James J. Carroll, the St. Louis "betting commissioner," who for years had been widely quoted on the sports pages of the country as setting odds on the Kentucky Derby winter book and the baseball pennant races. Senator Wiley, speaking like the prosecutor in Camus's novel, *The Stranger*, became the voice of official morality:

SENATOR WILEY: Have you any children?

MR. CARROLL: Yes, I have a boy.

SENATOR WILEY: How old is he?

MR. CARROLL: Thirty-three.

SENATOR WILEY: Does he gamble?

MR. CARROLL: No.

SENATOR WILEY: Would you like to see him grow up and become a gambler, either professional or amateur?

MR. CARROLL: No...

SENATOR WILEY: All right. Is your son interested in your business?

MR. CARROLL: No, he is a manufacturer.

SENATOR WILEY: Why do you not get him into the business?

MR. CARROLL: Well, psychologically a great many people are unsuited for gambling.

Retreating from this gambit, the senator sought to pin Carroll down on his contributions to political campaigns:

SENATOR WILEY: Now this morning I asked you whether you contributed any money for political candidates or parties, and you said not more than \$200 at any one time. I presume that does not indicate the total of your contributions in any one campaign, does it?

MR. CARROLL: Well, it might, might not, Senator. I have been an “againster” in many instances. I am a reader of *The Nation* for fifty years and they have advertisements calling for contributions for different candidates, different causes. . . . They carried an advertisement for George Norris; I contributed, I think, to that, and to the elder La Follette.

Carroll, who admitted to having been in the betting business since 1899, was the sophisticated — but not immoral! — counterpoint to moralist Wiley. Here was a man without the stigmata of the underworld or underground; he was worldly, cynical of official rhetoric, jaundiced about people’s motives, he was — an “againster” who believed that “all gambling legislation originates or stems from some group or some individual seeking special interests for himself or his cause.”

Asked why people gamble, Carroll distilled his experiences of fifty years with a remark that deserves a place in American social history: “I really don’t know how to answer the question,” he said. “I think gambling is a biological necessity for certain types. I think it is the quality that gives substance to their daydreams.”

In a sense, the entire Kefauver materials, unintentionally, seem to document that remark. For what the committee revealed time and time again was a picture of gambling as a basic institution in American life, flourishing openly and accepted widely. In many of the small towns, the gambling joint is as open as a liquor establishment. The town of Havana, in Mason County, Illinois, felt miffed when Governor Adlai Stevenson intervened against local gambling. In 1950, the town had raised \$15,000 of its \$50,000 budget by making friendly raids on the gambling houses

every month and having the owners pay fines. “With the gambling fines cut off,” grumbled Mayor Clarence Chester, “the next year is going to be tough.”

Apart from the gamblers, there were the mobsters. But what Senator Kefauver and company failed to understand was that the mobsters, like the gamblers, and like the entire gangdom generally, were seeking to become quasi-respectable and establish a place for themselves in American life. For the mobsters, by and large, had immigrant roots, and crime, as the pattern showed, was a route of social ascent and place in American life.

VI

The mobsters were able, where they wished, to “muscle in” on the gambling business because the established gamblers were wholly vulnerable, not being able to call on the law for protection. The senators, however, refusing to make any distinction between a gambler and a gangster, found it convenient to talk loosely of a nationwide conspiracy of “illegal” elements. Senator Kefauver asserted that a “nationwide crime syndicate does exist in the United States, despite the protestations of a strangely assorted company of criminals, self-serving politicians, plain blind fools, and others who may be honestly misguided, that there is no such combine.” The Senate committee report states the matter more dogmatically:

There is a nationwide crime syndicate known as the Mafia. . . . Its leaders are usually found in control of the most lucrative rackets in their cities. There are indications of a centralized direction and control of these rackets. . . . The Mafia is the cement that helps to bind the Costello-Adonis-Lansky syndicate of New York and the Accardo-Guzik-Fischetti syndicate of Chicago. . . . These groups have kept in touch with Luciano since his deportation from the country.

Unfortunately for a good story — and the existence of the Mafia would be a whale of a story — neither the Senate Crime Committee in its testimony, nor Kefauver in his book, presented any real evidence that the Mafia exists as a functioning organization. One finds police officials asserting before the Kefauver Committee their *belief* in the Mafia; the Narcotics Bureau *thinks* that a worldwide dope ring allegedly run by Luciano is part of the Mafia; but the only other “evidence” presented — aside from the incredulous responses both of Senator Kefauver and Rudolph Halley when nearly all the Italian gangsters asserted that they didn’t know about the Mafia — is that certain crimes bear “the earmarks of the Mafia.”

The legend of the Mafia has been fostered in recent years largely by the peephole writing team of Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer. In their *Chicago Confidential* they rattled off a series of names and titles that made the organization sound like a rival to an Amos and Andy Kingfish society. Few serious reporters, however, give it much credence. Burton Turkus, the Brooklyn prosecutor who broke up the “Murder, Inc.” ring, denies the existence of the Mafia. Nor could Senator Kefauver even make out much of a case for his picture of a national crime syndicate. He is forced to admit that “as it exists today [it] is an elusive and furtive but nonetheless tangible thing,” and that “its organization and machinations are not always easy to pinpoint.” His “evidence” that many gangsters congregate at certain times of the year in such places as Hot Springs, Arkansas, in itself does not prove much; people “in the trade” usually do, and as the loquacious late Willie Moretti of New Jersey said, in explaining how he had met the late Al Capone at a race track, “Listen, well-charactered people you don’t need introductions to; you just meet automatically.”

Why did the Senate Crime Committee plump so hard for its theory of the Mafia and a national crime syndicate? In part, they may have been misled by their own hearsay. The Senate committee was not in the position to do original research, and its staff, both legal and investigative, was incredibly small. Senator Kefauver had begun the investigation with the attitude that with so much smoke there must be a raging fire. But smoke can also mean a smoke screen. Mob activity is a field in which busy gossip and exaggeration flourish even more readily than in a radical political sect.

There is, as well, in the American temper, a feeling that “somewhere,” “somebody” is pulling all the complicated strings to which this jumbled world dances. In politics the labor image is “Wall Street” or “Big Business,” while the business stereotype was the “New Dealers.” In the field of crime, the side-of-the-mouth low-down was “Costello.”

The salient reason, perhaps, that the Kefauver Committee was taken in by its own myth of an omnipotent Mafia and a despotic Costello was its failure to assimilate and understand three of the more relevant sociological facts about institutionalized crime in its relation to the political life of large urban communities in America, namely: (1) the rise of the American Italian community, as part of the inevitable process of ethnic succession, to positions of importance in politics, a process that has been occurring independently but almost simultaneously in most cities with large Italian constituencies — New York, Chicago, Kansas City, Los

Angeles; (2) the fact that there are individual Italians who play prominent, often leading roles today in gambling and in the mobs; and (3) the fact that Italian gamblers and mobsters often possessed "status" within the Italian community itself and a "pull" in city politics. These three items are indeed related — but not so as to form a "plot."

VII

The Italian community has achieved wealth and political influence much later and in a harder way than previous immigrant groups. Early Jewish wealth, that of the German Jews of the late nineteenth century, was made largely in banking and merchandising. To that extent, the dominant group in the Jewish community was outside of, and independent of, the urban political machines. Later Jewish wealth, among the East European immigrants, was built in the garment trades, though with some involvement with the Jewish gangster, who was typically an industrial racketeer (Arnold Rothstein, Lepke and Gurrah, etc.) Among Jewish lawyers, a small minority, such as the "Tammany lawyer" (like the protagonist of Sam Ornitz's *Haunch, Paunch and Jowl*) rose through politics and occasionally touched the fringes of crime. Most of the Jewish lawyers, by and large the communal leaders, climbed rapidly, however, in the opportunities that established and legitimate Jewish wealth provided. Irish immigrant wealth in the northern urban centers, concentrated largely in construction, trucking, and the waterfront, has, to a substantial extent, been wealth accumulated in and through political alliance, e.g. favoritism in city contracts. Control of the politics of the city thus has been crucial for the continuance of Irish political wealth. This alliance of Irish immigrant wealth and politics has been reciprocal; many noted Irish political figures lent their names as important window-dressing for business corporations (Al Smith, for example, who helped form the U.S. Trucking Corporation, whose executive head for many years was William J. McCormack, the alleged "Mr. Big" of the New York waterfront) while Irish businessmen have lent their wealth to further the careers of Irish politicians. Irish mobsters have rarely achieved status in the Irish community, but have served as integral arms of the politicians, as strong-arm men on election day.

The Italians found the more obvious big-city paths from rags to riches preempted. In part this was due to the character of the early Italian immigration. Most of them were unskilled and from rural stock. Jacob Riis could remark in the '90s, "the Italian comes in at the bottom and

stays there.” These dispossessed agricultural laborers found jobs as ditch-diggers, on the railroads as section hands, along the docks, in the service occupations, as shoemakers, barbers, garment workers, and stayed there. Many were fleeced by the “padrone” system, a few achieved wealth from truck farming, wine growing, and marketing produce; but this “marginal wealth” was not the source of coherent and stable political power.

Significantly, although the number of Italians in the U.S. is about a third as high as the number of Irish, and of the 30,000,000 Catholic communicants in the United States, about half are of Irish descent and a sixth of Italian, there is not one Italian bishop among the hundred Catholic bishops in this country, or one Italian archbishop among the twenty-one archbishops. The Irish have a virtual monopoly. This is a factor related to the politics of the American church; but the condition also is possible because there is not significant or sufficient wealth among Italian Americans to force some parity.

The children of the immigrants, the second and third generation, became wise in the ways of the urban slums. Excluded from the political ladder—in the early '30s there were almost no Italians on the city payroll in top jobs, nor in books of the period can one find discussion of Italian political leaders—finding few open routes to wealth, some turned to illicit ways. In the children's court statistics of the 1930s, the largest group of delinquents were the Italian; nor were there any Italian communal or social agencies to cope with these problems. Yet it was, oddly enough, the quondam racketeer, seeking to become respectable, who provided one of the major supports for the drive to win a political voice for Italians in the power structure of the urban political machines.

This rise of the Italian political bloc was connected, at least in the major northern urban centers, to another important development which tended to make the traditional relation between the politician and the protected or tolerated illicit operator more close than it had been in the past. This is the fact that the urban political machines had to evolve new forms of fund-raising since the big business contributions, which once went heavily into municipal politics, now—with the shift in the locus of power—go largely into national affairs. (The ensuing corruption in national politics, as recent congressional investigations show, is no petty matter; the scruples of businessmen do not seem much superior to those of the gamblers.) One way urban political machines raised their money resembled that of the large corporations which are no longer dependent on Wall Street: by self-financing—that is, by “taxing” the large number

of municipal employees who bargain collectively with City Hall for their wage increases. So the firemen's union contributed money to O'Dwyer's campaign.

A second method was taxing the gamblers. The classic example, as *Life* reported, was Jersey City, where a top lieutenant of the Hague machine spent his full time screening applicants for unofficial bookmaking licenses. If found acceptable, the applicant was given a "location," usually the house or store of a loyal precinct worker, who kicked into the machine treasury a high proportion of the large rent exacted. The one thousand bookies and their one thousand landlords in Jersey City formed the hard core of the political machine that sweated and bled to get out the votes for Hague.

A third source for the financing of these machines was the new, and often illegally earned, Italian wealth. This is well illustrated by the career of Costello and his emergence as a political power in New York. Here the ruling motive has been the search for an entrée — for oneself and one's ethnic group — into the ruling circles of the big city.

Frank Costello made his money originally in bootlegging. After repeal, his big break came when Huey Long, desperate for ready cash to fight the old-line political machines, invited Costello to install slot machines in Louisiana. Costello did, and he flourished. Together with Dandy Phil Kastel, he also opened the Beverly Club, an elegant gambling establishment just outside New Orleans, at which have appeared some of the top entertainers in America. Subsequently Costello invested his money in New York real estate (including 79 Wall Street, which he later sold), the Copacabana night club, and a leading brand of Scotch whiskey.

Costello's political opportunity came when a money-hungry Tammany, starved by lack of patronage from Roosevelt and La Guardia, turned to him for financial support. The Italian community in New York has for years nursed a grievance against the Irish and, to a lesser extent, the Jewish political groups for monopolizing political power. They complained about the lack of judicial jobs, the small number — usually one — of Italian congressmen, the lack of representation on the state tickets. But the Italians lacked the means to make their ambitions a reality. Although they formed a large voting bloc, there was rarely sufficient wealth to finance political clubs. Italian immigrants, largely poor peasants from southern Italy and Sicily, lacked the mercantile experience of the Jews, and the political experience gained in the seventy-five-year history of Irish immigration.

During the Prohibition years, the Italian racketeers had made certain political contacts in order to gain protection. Costello, always the compromiser and fixer rather than the muscle-man, was the first to establish relations with Jimmy Hines, the powerful leader of the West Side in Tammany Hall. But his rival, Lucky Luciano, suspicious of the Irish, and seeking more direct power, backed and elected Al Marinelli for district leader on the Lower West Side. Marinelli in 1932 was the only Italian leader inside Tammany Hall. Later, he was joined by Dr. Paul Sarubbi, a partner of Johnny Torrio in a large, legitimate liquor concern. Certainly, Costello and Luciano represented no “unified” move by the Italians as a whole for power; within the Italian community there are as many divisions as in any other group. What is significant is that different Italians, for different reasons, and in various fashions, were achieving influence for the first time. Marinelli became county clerk of New York and a leading power in Tammany. In 1937, after being blasted by Tom Dewey, then running for district attorney, as a “political ally of thieves . . . and big-shot racketeers,” Marinelli was removed from office by Governor Lehman. The subsequent conviction by Dewey of Luciano and Hines, and the election of La Guardia, left most of the Tammany clubs financially weak and foundering. This was the moment Costello made his move. In a few years, by judicious financing, he controlled a block of “Italian” leaders in the Hall—as well as some Irish on the upper West Side, and some Jewish leaders on the East Side—and was able to influence the selection of a number of Italian judges. The most notable incident, revealed by a wire tap on Costello’s phone, was the “Thank you, Francisco” call in 1943 by Supreme Court nominee Thomas Aurelio, who gave Costello full credit for his nomination.

It was not only Tammany that was eager to accept campaign contributions from newly rich Italians, even though some of these nouveaux riches had “arrived” through bootlegging and gambling. Fiorello La Guardia, the wildest mind that Melting Pot politics has ever produced, understood in the early ’30s where much of his covert support came from. (So, too, did Vito Marcantonio, an apt pupil of the master: Marcantonio has consistently made deals with the Italian leaders of Tammany Hall—in 1943 he supported Aurelio, and refused to repudiate him even when the Democratic party formally did.) Joe Adonis, who had built a political following during the late ’20s when he ran a popular speakeasy, aided La Guardia financially to a considerable extent in 1933. “The Democrats haven’t recognized the Italians,” Adonis told a friend.

"There is no reason for the Italians to support anybody but La Guardia; the Jews have played ball with the Democrats and haven't gotten much out of it. They know it now. They will vote for La Guardia. So will the Italians."

Adonis played his cards shrewdly. He supported La Guardia, but also a number of Democrats for local and judicial posts, and became a power in the Brooklyn area. His restaurant was frequented by Kenny Sutherland, the Coney Island Democratic leader; Irwin Steingut, the Democratic minority leader in Albany; Anthony DiGiovanni, later a councilman; William O'Dwyer, and Jim Moran. But, in 1937, Adonis made the mistake of supporting Royal Copeland against La Guardia, and the irate Fiorello finally drove Adonis out of New York.

La Guardia later turned his ire against Costello, too. Yet Costello survived and reached the peak of his influence in 1942, when he was instrumental in electing Michael Kennedy leader of Tammany Hall. Despite the Aurelio fiasco, which first brought Costello into notoriety, he still had sufficient power in the Hall to swing votes for Hugo Rogers as Tammany leader in 1945, and had a tight grip on some districts as late as 1948. In those years many a Tammany leader came hat in hand to Costello's apartment, or sought him out on the golf links, to obtain the nomination for a judicial post.

During this period, other Italian political leaders were also coming to the fore. Generoso Pope, whose Colonial Sand and Stone Company began to prosper through political contacts, became an important political figure, especially when his purchase of the two largest Italian-language dailies (later merged into one) and of a radio station gave him almost a monopoly of channels to Italian-speaking opinion of the city. Through Generoso Pope, and through Costello, the Italians became a major political force in New York.

That the urban machines, largely Democratic, have financed their heavy campaign costs in this fashion rather than having to turn to the "moneyed interests," explains in some part why these machines were able, in part, to support the New and Fair Deals without suffering the pressures they might have been subjected to had their source of money supply been the business groups. Although he has never publicly revealed his political convictions, it is likely that Frank Costello was a fervent admirer of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his efforts to aid the common man. The basic measures of the New Deal, which most Americans today agree were necessary for the public good, would not have been possible without the support of the "corrupt" big-city machines.

VIII

There is little question that men of Italian origin appeared in most of the leading roles in the high drama of gambling and mobs, just as twenty years ago the children of East European Jews were the most prominent figures in organized crime, and before that individuals of Irish descent were similarly prominent. To some extent statistical accident and the tendency of newspapers to emphasize the few sensational figures gives a greater illusion about the domination of illicit activities by a single ethnic group than all the facts warrant. In many cities, particularly in the South and on the West Coast, the mob and gambling fraternity consisted of many other groups, and often, predominantly, native white Protestants. Yet it is clear that in the major northern urban centers there was a distinct ethnic sequence in the modes of obtaining illicit wealth, and that uniquely in the case of the recent Italian elements, the former bootleggers and gamblers provided considerable leverage for the growth of political influence as well. A substantial number of Italian judges sitting on the bench in New York today are indebted in one fashion or another to Costello; so too are many Italian district leaders—as well as some Jewish and Irish politicians. And the motive in establishing Italian political prestige in New York was generous rather than scheming for personal advantage. For Costello it was largely a case of ethnic pride. As in earlier American eras, organized illegality became a stepladder of social ascent.

To the world at large, the news and pictures of Frank Sinatra, for example, mingling with former Italian mobsters could come somewhat as a shock. Yet to Sinatra, and to many Italians, these were men who had grown up in their neighborhoods, and who were, in some instances, bywords in the community for their helpfulness and their charities. The early Italian gangsters were hoodlums—rough, unlettered, and young (Al Capone was only twenty-nine at the height of his power). Those who survived learned to adapt. By now they are men of middle age or older. They learned to dress conservatively. Their homes are in respectable suburbs. They sent their children to good schools and had sought to avoid publicity. Costello even went to a psychiatrist in his efforts to overcome a painful feeling of inferiority in the world of manners.

As happens with all “new” money in American society, the rough and ready contractors, the construction people, trucking entrepreneurs, as well as racketeers, polished up their manners and sought recognition and respectability in their own ethnic as well as in the general community. The “shanty” Irish became the “lace curtain” Irish, and then

moved out for wider recognition. Sometimes acceptance came first in established "American" society, and this was a certificate for later recognition by the ethnic community, a process well illustrated by the belated acceptance in established Negro society of such figures as Sugar Ray Robinson and Joe Louis, as well as leading popular entertainers.

Yet, after all, the foundation of many a distinguished older American fortune was laid by sharp practices and morally reprehensible methods. The pioneers of American capitalism were not graduated from Harvard's School of Business Administration. The early settlers and founding fathers, as well as those who "won the West" and built up cattle, mining, and other fortunes, often did so by shady speculations and a not inconsiderable amount of violence. They ignored, circumvented, or stretched the law when it stood in the way of America's destiny, and their own — or were themselves the law when it served their purposes. This has not prevented them and their descendants from feeling proper moral outrage when under the changed circumstances of the crowded urban environments later comers pursued equally ruthless tactics.

IX

Ironically, the social development that made possible the rise to political influence sounds, too, the knell of the Italian gangster. For it is the growing number of Italians with professional training and legitimate business success that both prompts and permits the Italian group to wield increasing political influence; and increasingly it is the professionals and businessmen who provide models for Italian youth today, models that hardly existed twenty years ago. Ironically, the headlines and exposés of "crime" of the Italian "gangsters" came years after the fact. Many of the top "crime" figures long ago had forsworn violence, and even their income, in large part, was derived from legitimate investments (real estate in the case of Costello, motor haulage and auto dealer franchises in the case of Adonis) or from such quasi-legitimate but socially respectable sources as gambling casinos. Hence society's "retribution" in the jail sentences for Costello and Adonis was little more than a trumped-up morality that disguised a social hypocrisy.

Apart from these considerations, what of the larger context of crime and the American way of life? The passing of the Fair Deal signalizes, oddly, the passing of an older pattern of illicit activities. The gambling fever of the past decade and a half was part of the flush and exuberance of rising incomes, and was characteristic largely of new upper-middle-class

rich having a first fling at conspicuous consumption. These upper-middle-class rich, a significant new stratum in American life (not rich in the nineteenth-century sense of enormous wealth, but largely middle-sized businessmen and entrepreneurs of the service and luxury trades—the “tertiary economy” in Colin Clark’s phrase—who by the tax laws have achieved sizable incomes often much higher than the managers of the super-giant corporations) were the chief patrons of the munificent gambling casinos. During the war decade when travel was difficult, gambling and the lush resorts provided important outlets for this social class. Now they are settling down, learning about Europe and culture. The petty gambling, the betting and bingo which relieve the tedium of small town life, or the expectation among the urban slum dwellers of winning a sizable sum by a “lucky number” or a “lucky horse” goes on. To quote Bernard Baruch: “You can’t stop people from gambling on horses. And why should you prohibit a man from backing his own judgment? It’s another form of personal initiative.” But the lush profits are passing from gambling, as the costs of coordination rise. And in the future it is likely that gambling, like prostitution, winning tacit acceptance as a necessary fact, will continue on a decentralized, small entrepreneur basis.

But passing, too, is a political pattern, the system of political “bosses” which in its reciprocal relation provided “protection” for and was fed revenue from crime. The collapse of the “boss” system was a product of the Roosevelt era. Twenty years ago Jim Farley’s task was simple; he had to work only on some key state bosses. Now there is no longer such an animal. New Jersey Democracy was once ruled by Frank Hague; now there are five or six men, each top dog, for the moment, in his part of the state or faction of the party. Within the urban centers, the old Irish-dominated political machines in New York, Boston, Newark, and Chicago have fallen apart. The decentralization of the metropolitan centers, the growth of suburbs and satellite towns, the break-up of the old ecological patterns of slum and transient belts, the rise of functional groups, the increasing middle-class character of American life, all contribute to this decline.

With the rationalization and absorption of some illicit activities into the structure of the economy, the passing of an older generation that had established a hegemony over crime, the general rise of minority groups to social position, and the break-up of the urban boss system, the pattern of crime we have discussed is passing as well. Crime, of course, remains as long as passion and the desire for gain remain. But big, organized city crime, as we have known it for the past seventy-five years, was based on

more than these universal motives. It was based on certain characteristics of the American economy, American ethnic groups, and American politics. The changes in all these areas means that it too, in the form we have known it, is at an end.

LETTER TO THE CAPITOL

by Philip Levine

Our crops were lost. Perhaps you never knew
 It never came, the rain for which we prayed,
 And only the hunger in us seemed to grow,
 The hunger and the mouths. There was no shade
 Except the shade of clouds of ruined land
 Carried by the wind we care not where.
 That land we loved, as careful as a hand
 Is settling now, sifting from the air
 On you, there, who neither see nor care.
 We know, you're busy with the affairs of state;
 The Capitol has no time. Send us a prayer
 In triplicate; a clerk to take the weight
 Of loss that's in our lives. In time you'll share
 With us the drought of love, the crop of hate.

Volume 15, Number 1 Spring 1955

Philip Levine's poems have also appeared in the *Review* in summer 1958, spring/summer 1977, and summer 1985. He had a story in the summer 1990 issue.

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The Man They Threw Out of Jets

BY BRUCE JAY FRIEDMAN

Volume 15, Number 3 Fall 1955

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High above Gila Bend, in the middle of Arizona, with the desert floor pushing hot blasts of air against the belly of his tiny plane, the Major's mind fell apart. He screamed, shook his sunburned fists, and swore that he would beat the jets in a race across the sky. From the rear seat of the plane I watched and listened, yet I never said a word.

I was going to. I had made up my mind that I would tell the Air Force that one of their fliers was insane and something ought to be done about him. Yet when the day was over, I never said a word. I couldn't.

The man who first told me about the Major was a Negro jet pilot who flew me to the desert gunnery range from a nearby air base. The Air Force had assigned me to take some pictures of the jet gunnery ranges, and when I asked the name of the man who was in charge of the ranges, he began to talk about the Major. We were at 30,000 feet, and I was being lulled to sleep by the soft, even whistle inside the plane.

"When they took him out of jets," the pilot said, "they should've taken him far away from here where he could never hear the sound of one. That was the real crime. You take a piece out of a man when you take him out of jets."

"Why did they take him out of jets?" I asked.

“His ears,” the pilot said. “He gets up high in a jet and he can’t hear anything. His ears pop. I’m not saying he should still be flying them. All I’m saying is they did a foolish thing keeping him here on the ranges. Everything is jets here. Everywhere you look.”

The desert range on which he dropped me was the nerve center for the other ranges. It had no jet targets, just a short runway and a wooden control tower which directed jets to the gunnery ranges spotted around the desert. I walked along the runway, feeling the heat from the desert, and watching the sky. The jets were all over the place. They traveled overhead in straight lines as if someone very big was pulling them on thin, powerful strings. And they filled the air with the mixture of sad cries and terrible gliding screams the jets had brought to the air age. On the desert, there was no hiding from them, and, as the pilot had said, they were everything.

The single plane on the runway was not a jet. It had a propeller. A Chinese mechanic circled the T-6 nervously, moving in under the wings, climbing up on the fuselage, tightening, rubbing, polishing, smoothing. He seemed very afraid someone would come and find he hadn’t done a good job. The little plane sparkled in the sun, sleek and scrubbed down like a fine racehorse, yet it made me think of a shiny Model T Ford I had once seen parked between two late-model Oldsmobiles. At another time, in another place, it might have seemed beautiful, but the jets overhead had a way of making all other flying machines appear spindly.

I asked the Chinese mechanic where I could find the Major, and he told me that the little T-6 was the Major’s plane. The Major would be along soon. I squatted beside the little plane and waited, watching the packs of jets as they passed overhead on their way to the targets. Four at a time would come over, and then one would pitch out to the side and the others would follow it into a giant circle of violence.

In a little while, a squat, charred-looking man with major’s leaves drove up in a jeep. The Chinese mechanic came down from the fuselage to open the door for him, and the Major walked out carrying bundles of money in his arms. He piled them into the rear baggage compartment of the small plane.

“You refueled, chopsticks?” he asked the mechanic, completely ignoring me.

“All refueled, Major,” the mechanic said.

“Then I’m shoving,” the Major said, wriggling into a seat parachute.

I stood up and introduced myself. “The Air Force said when I came

out here there'd be someone to fly me over the ranges," I said. "For my pictures."

He made the chute comfortable around his crotch and asked, "What are you? A first or second balloon?" He still hadn't looked at me.

"First lieutenant," I said.

"First balloon," he said. "All right, first balloon. You're a first balloon you been around long enough to know today's pay day. I got 150 bastardos waiting out there to be paid."

"I just know what they told me," I said.

He looked up now, as if he'd begun to smell something sour. "All you know is what they told you?" he repeated unbelievably. "You're quite a balloon. That's all I can say. You're really something. Get in."

His neck got very red, and I was amazed at how quickly he had gotten mad. He made it seem as if he had known me for a long time and had a thousand reasons for hating me.

In one motion, he swung his squat body up on the wing and into the front seat of the plane. He started the engine. The Chinese mechanic told me a chute was in the back seat of the plane and that I should put my hat in the rear baggage compartment. I opened the flap of the compartment and it came off in my hand. I stood there, holding it above my head, not really knowing what to do with it. The wind from the propeller blew my hair over my face. It also blew some of the money out of the baggage compartment. Dollar bills came flying out along the runway. The Chinese mechanic wrung his hands and chased after them. The Major turned around and saw me holding the flap.

"You broke my plane," he said. "Why did you break my plane?" His voice was low like people who are too mad to shout.

"I didn't break anything that wasn't broken before."

"Get in my plane," he said, a little louder. "Get off the ground and get in my plane. You broke my goddamned plane, now get in. *Get in!*"

I got into the rear seat and put my legs around the dual control stick, fumbling for the safety harness. The Chinese mechanic stood clear, his khakis flapping in the prop wash, and the Major, after a short taxi run down the field, wrenched the plane off the ground into a steep, shuddering bank. It was a weird takeoff that made my head ache. The wings trembled dangerously in the desert wind until the little plane righted itself. I held the bottom of the seat with my hands and inhaled some of the sweet-smelling gasoline that washed back over me. The Major flew low over the barren desert, shifting his head from side to side. When the jets whined overhead towards the ranges the Major looked the other way,

ignoring them. He was completely silent as if he was alone in the plane, and we flew that way, not speaking, for about fifteen minutes until we reached the target range. From the sky, it looked like a giant buzzard. I had a brief flash of some jets diving down upon it, and then the Major brought the plane into the same kind of insane bank he had used on the takeoff. Without circling the field, he bent the plane backward as if it were his body and thrust it straight down towards the target range, pulling out at the last possible second. It made the top of my head throb, and throughout it, I had the feeling there was no plane and I was alone on a man's back through a perfect high-board jackknife.

On the ground, seven men, bare to the waist, their backs an angry red from the sun, were standing in a loose line on the target range. In back of them were rows of skull-like automobile targets, shot through with black holes from the jet rockets. Off in the distance were other targets, ragged circles of tires and huge bulls'-eyes you could see through. When the Major's plane rode up, the wet bodies of the men became rigid in the position of attention. The landing had shaken me up and I stayed in the cockpit while the Major vaulted to the ground. Then he paid the men and dismissed them, catching the sergeant in charge by the arm.

"You find out who took the tire from the pick-up truck?" he asked.

"No, Major."

"Nobody knows, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, ask them again. Next time I come round I want the tire out here. The tire isn't here and I'll make it your ass. One thing I don't hack is a man stealing. You steal from trucks, soon you're stealing from each other. The tire isn't here, it'll be your ass. Then I'll line every bastardo you got up in the sun till they drop."

"I asked everyone," the sergeant said. "I—"

The Major didn't wait for him to finish. He came back to the plane and looked at me briefly and bitterly as if to say his words were as much for my benefit as that of the range troops. He swung into the cockpit. The range troops had turned around and were squatting in front of the targets watching the Major's takeoff. It seemed to be a ritual that they had witnessed many times. I had fastened the safety harness and clamped on my parachute, but when the takeoff came I wasn't ready. He pulled the plane off the ground, forcing it into the air almost straight up, like a helicopter. The desert heat was much stronger than when I had first come to the main range. I had kept the cockpit closed during the takeoff and little globes of moisture were forming on the inside of the plastic canopy. I opened my

collar and tried to swallow the thickness that was starting in my throat. The Major lurched off sharply in the direction of another range, keeping low as if to avoid the jets that flew by in packs overhead. He flew with short, twisting motions as if he was the plane and he was not sure where he was supposed to go.

At each of the remaining three ranges, he paid the barebacked men who stood in the sun and told them there were several things he just didn't like. "One of them is stealing," he said. "Anyone who knows me knows I treat a man fair. I got a swimming pool for the men on weekends. I can't hack something like stealing, though. I catch a man stealing and it's his ass." And at each of the ranges he took off and landed in the same spinning, writhing manner. When we left the final range, my clothes were all wet and tight, and I was getting sick. Instead of turning back towards the main range where we had started, he twisted off in the opposite direction. He flew even closer to the ground than before, and the plane began to buffet and shake from the steady blankets of heat that came up from the desert. The jets kept sweeping by us overhead and disappearing into the clouds far ahead of us making it seem as though we were going very slow. He kept on the same course, brushing along on top of the desert, going farther away from our starting point. I wanted him to go back to the main range. I had long given up on any pictures and my head hurt very much. It annoyed me most of all that he hadn't said a word since I had broken his plane. All through paying the troops and the landings and takeoffs.

In a little while, the desert began to change. There were patches of shrubbery here and there and not so much barrenness. On the rim of the horizon were some small, sloping mountains and one slightly larger one towards which the Major seemed headed. The jets began to taper off in number until there were none at all in sight. We flew silently across the desert. The only noise was a clop-chopping one that came from the engine. When he began to talk, he sounded very old over the intercom and what he said was like a chant.

"I can think better out here," the chant said. "The one thing I can't do around jets is think. Did you read that, balloon?"

I held the talking piece of the intercom in my hand, pushed the little rise, and said, "Yes, I read it."

"I can think better out here," the chant continued. "I want you to get the picture. When anybody comes out here, all they see is jets. Nobody looks at the ground. Nobody looks at what we have here, what we're doing. They take one look at the jets and anything else can drop dead. I

like to take people out here and give them the picture. Did you read that?"

I said "Yes" over the intercom. I was thinking of saying "Roger," and changed my mind. I always felt silly saying it, for one thing. And I was beginning to dislike the Major. I felt very sick and he could have told me all of this on the ground when we got back to the range. Or he didn't have to tell it to me at all.

"This is the picture, balloon," the chant continued. "I got 150 bastardos working out there on the desert for me. They work for me. They don't fly a jet. They don't touch a jet. When people come out here to the ranges, they don't even *see* my men until I give them the picture. They stick their nose in the air and all they see is jets. Anything else can drop dead. My men work for me and they have to work. I work their ass. I worked on a construction gang before the Air Force and that's where I learned to work. They work Saturday if I want them to work, and Sunday. They'll work for me and they won't bitch because I treat a man fair. Rough, too. I mean I'll kick a man in the ass, but then I'll turn around and let him have a swimming pool if he'll move his behind and build it. I'm sorry for before. The reason I got sore at you is I've had two balloons working for me I had to get rid of. They didn't hack working. They watched the jets too much. I caught them and got rid of them."

He kept the plane close to the desert. It shuddered continually from the thermal waves. Whenever he wanted to make a point, he would do something sharp and violent with the plane. My headache came back, and the intercom began to pinch my skin. We were coming pretty close to the mountain.

"What we got here, balloon, is Russia and China. I been to China and shot down Chinks and I know the Chink ground. There's a fellow comes by here who knows the ground in Russia. We build up the ranges to look like China and Russia and then the jets come over and bomb the ranges just like they're fighting the next war. Then you know what we do? We take what they bombed and we build it up again to look like China and Russia. Did you read all that?"

"Uh-huh," I said. I was beginning to worry about the mountain. It wasn't very high, but it was there, and the Major wasn't paying much attention to it.

"We take the little pieces of tanks and guns and trenches and we build them up again so the jets can do the same thing again. We're always picking up after the jets. Sometimes I send my bastardos out on Saturday and Sunday to build up the ranges."

He saw the mountain and began slowly to gain altitude.

"That's important, balloon. If that isn't as important as the jets I don't know what is. I mean picking up after them. Anything they break up, we go and build up again. That's why it eats me when people come out here to the ranges and all they see is the jets. All the Air Force sees is the jets, too. We got to steal wood and paint out from their behind for the target ranges. Once I paid for some paint myself so the jets could see a tank and blow the ass off it."

He leaned over the side, looking out at the mountain, and then he looked back at me. When he began talking, his voice had a note of urgency to it.

"You're pretty young, balloon," he said. "Young balloons come into the Air Force, all they know is jets. They don't remember anything else flying in the air. Everywhere they look, they see jets, jets, jets. When I get hold of a young balloon, I like to take him out and show him what another kind of airplane can do. That's why I land and take off like that. Did you ever see a jet fly like that?"

"No," I said. "I never did." He was rougher on the controls now and he seemed to be getting drunk with his own words.

"Did you know a T-6 can pull G's? Tell me when you feel the G's."

There was still some space between us and the mountain, but not much. He pulled back on the stick until the plane slowed down and almost stalled. Then he thrust the stick forward and pushed the little plane into a spin. The sky passed over my head, and then the wing, and the little plane pitched forward like a broken glider. We whipped downward quietly with the wind washing against the wings. "Tell me when you feel them," he hollered. "Tell me when you feel them."

He spun the other way. It made my eyes bulge and it hurt in places where I never dreamed it would hurt. In my wrists and in back of my knees and on my elbows. We went down further and I yelled, "I feel them. I feel them." I would have said it earlier, but I forgot.

He leveled off and looked back at me. His eyes were wide and his lips were very wet in the corners. His words came fast. "That's what I mean," he said. "If anyone told you a T-6 could pull G's you'd bust a gut laughing. There's more."

He did a slow roll. "A T-6 can fly, balloon," he said, raising his voice. He did a barrel roll. "A T-6 can fly." Then he stood the plane on one wing and held it there as if he was trying to decide what to do next. He looked back at me and probably saw the four dots before I did. They were miles behind us, and suddenly they weren't. The sun caught the

four dots on their wings and turned them into jets. They flew together with little threads of black fuel smoke steaming from their tails and came forward inevitably in that straight line until they were close.

“They’re not even supposed to be here,” the Major said. “I’m glad you’re here. This is the first time I ever had a balloon here to see how they can mess you up. Everywhere you go around here they turn up. There’s no place you can go.”

He hunched over the controls and gunned the plane forward. “Watch while I beat them to the mountain. I’ll beat them in a T-6.” When the plane reached its maximum speed, it began to shake and I held tight to the seat. The Major was standing up a little at the controls, and as he flew, he yelled, “*Let’s see how fast you can go. I’m only in a T-6.*” We were too close and too low to go over the top of the mountain. The Major turned the plane over on its side, and we crept along the edges of the mountain slope like a fly on a ceiling. I saw the jets speed by over our heads and take the mountain easily. They became four dots again and finally disappeared. The Major shook his fist at them again and yelled, “*You weren’t even supposed to be here.*”

On the other side of the mountain he sat back in his seat and headed the plane in the direction of the main range. “I’m really glad you were here, balloon,” he said, quietly. “I always wanted to show someone what they can do to you.” He didn’t say anything else, and when we came in over the main range, he set the plane down with one of his landings. The sun had gone down, and it was cooler now. We had been flying for about three hours. I was sore all over my body and nauseated from all the flying. I didn’t want to look at another plane. When the Chinese mechanic came over and asked me whether I’d lost my cookies, I kidded with him for a while, but in the back of my mind I knew I wanted to talk to someone about the Major and tell them how he had carried on over the desert. I didn’t know exactly how I would present it or what I would say. All I knew is I wanted to tell someone about him. But as I say, something came up and I never did. The whole thing took about ten minutes. After the Major had jumped out of his plane and the mechanic came over to talk to me, a siren rang on the range and everyone came running over to the tower and climbing up to the top. I ran over too, with the mechanic. Everyone who worked on the main range was gathered around an airman with earphones who sat next to a radio set. From the top of the tower I saw the little Major running towards the little plane which couldn’t have had much fuel left in it. From what I could make out, a French pilot had misjudged a target on one of the gunnery ranges and nosed right into the

ground in a jet. Since the other jets couldn't land in the desert, his squadron leader was radioing in for some help. The mechanic said that crash rescue was part of the Major's job. Everyone watched the Major take off, in the same rough way, and a very young man said, "He gets off the ground, doesn't he?"

The Major took off in the direction of Range 2, the scene of the accident. The fellow with the radio picked up the Major on the radio and stayed with him until the Major landed on the desert. There was radio silence then for a while, and then the tower man said the Major had scooped the Frenchman out of the cockpit and taken off for the main base with him. The Frenchman's safety harness had come undone in the crash and he had gotten it in the face when he fell forward on the instrument panel. The Major said over the radio he had the Frenchman in the back seat of the plane and the foreign pilot was unconscious. You couldn't get every single detail sitting there in the tower listening to it second-hand from the radio man. But there was quite a bit of excitement when the radio man said that the Major couldn't land because each time he circled the field and made his approach, the unconscious Frenchman in the back fell over on the controls forcing the plane into a spin. It was difficult to land, too, because of the jets. Since they burn up so much fuel and can't stay up long, they take priority in landing. The Major had to circle the field seven times before he got in. Once he had touched down, the Frenchman died immediately on the runway, and that's about all there is to the story. Except that, as I say, I never told anyone about the screaming or the race with the jets. Not because I was suddenly convinced the Major was a big deal and a hero. And not because I suddenly changed my mind about him and saw the light—that he was really important and very sane and that everyone else was crazy. There were no impressive reasons for it. I just thought it over and decided I wasn't going to do anything.

A New Life

BY NOLAN MILLER

Volume 16, Number 2 Summer 1956

Nolan Miller, professor emeritus at Antioch College, has been fiction editor, associate editor, guest editor, and a member of the editorial board of the *Review*.

This story was included in the *O. Henry Prize Stories of 1957*. Other stories appeared in these pages in summer 1946, summer 1951, and winter 1959.

His "Conversations with Mark Strand" appeared in the winter and spring 1981 issues. He has also contributed essay reviews and numerous book reviews.

Nobody was so brave as to differ with old Mrs. Deen the long, dry summer that she was kept in her bed, determinedly recovering from her stroke. She wasn't going to die. She just knew. Always she had been as vain of a conviction as of a virtue.

"My time hasn't come," she would peevishly insist to her frightened son, terrifying him as she hauled herself up on her pillows and rattled the dishes on her breakfast trays. With a spoiled, unforgiving grimace she swallowed cup after cup of the coffee substitute the doctor now forced her to use.

"How could I ever leave Edgar?" she demanded arrogantly of the timid neighbors who visited the flat to give her a bit of company during the hours her son was off on his job. "Without me, Edgar just wouldn't know which way to turn."

Every day found her much better, thank you! Her good appetite — wasn't that a sign? And her good spirits. Mornings she struggled into a pretty nightgown and made a choice of stoles, knitted hug-me-tights or ribboned bed jackets. She worked her gray hair into ringlets, made up her

lumpy face. Eyedrops kept the bright blue of her eyes sparkling like shattered glass.

If left alone — and there were hours of the afternoon when household duties kept the neighbors busy — Mrs. Deen was by turns angry or bored. Sometimes, even, she grew a little morbid. Then she got out her tatting, or reached for a deck of cards. She played a game that always came out to her satisfaction, though she cheated a little. She kept watch of the clock, growing more and more irritated by the dust and noise of the busy street outside her window. This neighborhood! It had changed much for the worse these last dozen years.

“There’s so much, so *much* we have to do,” she said in greeting of her pale, tall son, the instant he opened the door of the flat. Perhaps she could pity him — a little more than she pitied herself. He was burdened with the shopping and cleaning, the cooking and nursing. She announced orders for him, companionably, yet possessively.

Once he was out of her room, she turned down her radio to listen to his movements in the kitchen — stirring up one of his nice custards, or setting down a saucer of milk for the cat. He plowed the vacuum over the unfading roses of the living-room carpet, squeaked wax on the hall linoleum. Domestic sounds were as pleasant to her hearing as symphonies.

“What are we up to now, Edgar?” her strong, shrill voice pounded, the penetration of even a single minute of silence. “Must save some time for my room, mustn’t we?” She directed his dusting of her crowding bird’s-eye maple — bed, dresser, rocking chair — as if with a ringmaster’s whip. “Mind the mirror, now! — Don’t miss those chair rungs! — ”

Escaped to any corner beyond the reach of his mother’s voice, Edgar Deen seldom enjoyed a freedom unchastened by guilt. A timid boy, as he was a timid man deep in his thirties, the look on his face was of ravaged innocence after a secret and sinful night. Any dream of happiness he pushed away as self-indulgence. His hands were over-expressive and frightened, and as perfect a wave as any in a photograph was the beautiful yellow-brown wave over his smooth but tempestuous brow.

His sexual needs tormenting him bitterly, he was now the fascinated warm friend of a waitress. She worked long hours in a neighborhood eatery, and he held in the solitary frame of his thoughts his longing for her, an unfading desire. Doris was her name. On the evening of his mother’s sudden illness, the doctor having sent him away, he had dropped in to the Quick Lunch for coffee. Doris, new at the counter service, had at once spoken to him with that special attention a woman gives when aware of a need for sympathy.

He now saw her as often as he could. Doris had become peremptorily commanding of his adoration. In the crisp green and white of her uniform, her silver Indian bracelets, the fluff of ornamenting handkerchief on her plump breast, her head on her short neck rounded by dark, rich braids, with a ready beet-red smile she seemed constantly solicitous, reassuring, imperturbably patient. She had been married, had divorced her husband for desertion. Now she had a two-year-old girl to care for, lived in a single room where she preferred meeting Edgar, rather than in the streets of the neighborhood: after all, why risk being talked about?

Remorsefully, Edgar welcomed the advantage of running necessary errands in the late evenings, leaving his mother tucked in bed. “— Mind, only one stick of butter, now! —” Each time he got away, he would stand for a moment beneath his mother’s bedroom window, and as he listened to her breathing or coughing the constant lump in his throat would vengefully begin to spasm.

“I don’t know what it is,” he tried to explain to Doris. “I’d hate to see her die. I’d be feeling it was my fault.”

He wanted his mother to die. But he did not even guess this, the wish being so irrecoverably buried.

He continued to lie to her, as if only in that way, by lies, lies, he continued to love.

“Look at that!” Mrs. Deen would crow, wriggling a foot at the end of one of her useless legs. “I couldn’t do that yesterday.”

“You’re getting better.”

“I’ll be up before you know it!”

“Oh, I’m sure you will. We’re both sure, aren’t we?”

It was as if, sharing all of his mother’s life, he had to share her affliction. Mrs. Deen insisted she had no pains. Her legs were dead. But there were pains in Edgar’s legs, and he felt them constantly, even while at work, standing in his teller’s cage at the local bank.

Incessantly Mrs. Deen threw her orders at his head, as if outlining his ears, the shape of his secret thoughts, on a knife-thrower’s target-board. If Edgar sat down to look at the newspaper, though his response to her voice was as to a blinding thrust, he leapt to obey.

“— Garbage day tomorrow, remember. Get the can ready. . . . Those pop bottles of yours have been collecting dust for weeks. Worth two cents apiece. Trot them over to the Cut-Rate. . . . Bring me back a pint of the ice cream of the month. . . .”

Hurry back, hurry back.

By the time she was forced to go to sleep, Mrs. Deen's tongue would be swollen; she was exhausted to the point of tears. Yet she would try to smile on Edgar as if fondly, as if with dutiful coquetry.

"One thing you can't say. I'm not entirely useless."

"You're never useless to me, Ma." Edgar could manage to speak what pleased her. He then suggested he might take a turn in the night air—clear his head.

"Clear your head! You want time to be by yourself. Is that it? Well, we mustn't mind, I suppose. We understand."

The weeks continued to drift along. Mrs. Deen remained neither noticeably worse nor better. She clung to life as a doomed mountain-climber clings to crumbling stone. Hour after hour, bitterly, without forgiveness, as if unforgiving of a past bitterness, she lay watching her clock. Its hands moved, one fast, one slow, and it enraged her helplessly that the fast hand seemed to be Edgar who could, being younger, always sweep before her, in life, in time.

Unexpectedly, on a windy September morning while attending to her make-up, her creams and tissues and powders and lip and eyebrow pencils, on her lap, Mrs. Deen quietly heaved, falling back into the hollow of her pillow—as if suddenly commanded to close her eyes. She was in a coma. An expression of curiously contemptuous satisfaction stamped shut her gray lips.

The doctor was summoned to look at the squeezed white face which was like a pair of clenched fists. "We'll have to wait." And it was all he would say.

At first, Edgar was immensely moved by the grave profundity that was his earliest sense of shock; he had a feeling of pleasure, as if made aware of depths within him, rich and queer. He stayed home as along the street the shop signs creaked and rains as cool and sweet as brook water dashed the broiled pavements. From mother's window he watched leaves whirl and dive over the rooftops, heavy limbs split from the trees in the park, fragments of raw wood and bark drifting on the paths.

Late on the afternoon of the second day, sunshine combed through the lumps of clouds. Mrs. Deen stirred and her withered eyelids slowly ripped apart. She found herself unbewildered by consciousness. The room was empty except for the neighbor whom Edgar had asked in to spell his watch.

"He's gone," Mrs. Deen said, her words gratingly bitter.

"Just for a breath of air, poor boy."

"He's not alone," Mrs. Deen said. "Don't tell me different."

“Really, I don’t know.”

“Well, *I* know. A mother always knows when there’s a woman after her boy.”

In the past, there had been dozens — all sluts, all worthless — who had set their caps for him, tempted by his good looks, his steady job. But always she had been able to coax Edgar into being sensible.

Now she was helpless and felt unjustly abused. Her eyes focused on the neighbor’s face, she tried to raise herself to look from the window.

“I’ve got to see,” she groaned. The power of her anger and despair was a helping hand that she was unable to grasp. Suspended too long in uselessness, she now realized all her fears had been not of death but of betrayal.

Able to look, Mrs. Deen could have seen Edgar at that moment advancing through the street and its hurrying blur of traffic. By his side was Doris who pressed close as if mysteriously led.

“Shouldn’t we stay out of the park?” Doris said. She was only mindful of her clean white shoes.

Edgar shook his head. “We don’t have to bother now about what looks right.” He hesitated, however, before passing through the park gates.

“I wasn’t thinking of that,” Doris said. She raised her head high on the short neck, as if her enemy were still near. She had challenged Mrs. Deen, as she knew, for the greater portion of Edgar’s uneasy affection; she could only take it now, a poor victory won over a dying woman.

This late afternoon her mind was quite made up: Edgar would ask her to marry him. Within a few days, at the most, she would quit her job, move with her little girl into the flat across the street.

Edgar dully kicked out of his way a broken tree branch. As if held somehow more definitely in a realized sorrow of immediate injustice, he noticed that the leaves on the tree branch were wilted, though damp. A lack of rain all summer — and now, see what had happened.

“I suppose you think,” he said, “I’ll never get my mother out of my head.”

“It’s natural, right now.”

“I *will* forget her,” Edgar said, cruelly.

Doris had felt little resentment or jealousy of Mrs. Deen, though insistently — somehow as if wrongly — she desired her son.

Edgar complained of feeling many-headed from loss of sleep. All these hours wasted, wasted. And every minute he had been longing for Doris with her arms strong and warm around him.

"I think you can get it decided," Doris said, bluntly.

"Get what decided?"

"About our getting married."

"We shouldn't be thinking of that now!"

"It's the best time," Doris said. "You're sure to be missing her most right after it's happened."

"No! It's not right to talk like this." She was still as if a forbidden pleasure to him.

Doris admired his sensitivity, yet it depressed her. She was disturbed that Edgar kept turning to her, as if to a fire which had to be rekindled each time they were together so briefly. It seemed there was something more she was expected to offer him — something more than just herself.

"I do hope the doctor's there when I get back," Edgar said, worriedly.

"See here," Doris said. "Yesterday you were facing it better." She sought to explore, rather than test, all his feelings. She could not share his grief, yet Edgar expected, so it seemed, the flattery of sympathy always more subtly shaded.

He wondered at Doris's unaffected calm. She was more experienced with loneliness and suffering, as he knew. She had lost a husband, as he was losing a mother. Was this a reason for their being so indifferent to each other's loss?



Under the heavy snow of the bedclothes, Mrs. Deen tried to move her legs, which were as heavy as sunken logs.

The neighbor watched in alarm. "You mustn't get up!"

Mrs. Deen was sure someone held down her legs and her cheeks bloomed with angry spots as she coughed and fell back. . . .



Doris stopped to look in a refuse can for a newspaper. One at the bottom was not wet.

"You want to sit down?" Edgar was nervously pacing.

"If there's time," Doris answered.

"It's a quarter of five."

"There! That's how it is?"

"What's the matter?" Edgar glanced at her timidly.

"Rush, rush . . . it's always like that with us. You to your mother, me to the job, after we've had ten minutes together."

/ / /

"I know!" Mrs. Deen gasped. "I know!"

The neighbor feared Mrs. Deen was now delirious. She leaned down to catch every word from the old woman's throat.

"*They* want me to die. I know!"

/ / /

Doris continued dispiritedly, "People rush away from each other. It's always been like that."

"If they die — get old —" Edgar said.

"But *we're* alive. We need to hold on to each other. I must say I understand why your mother's held onto you. I don't find any fault with her at all."

She was thinking, Edgar was sure, of the loss of her husband, a loss to her simply being a discreditor.

"She couldn't hold on to your father," Doris went on. "So she's held to you."

"But my father died when I was a baby," Edgar said.

"How can you be sure it's true?"

"Would my mother lie to me?"

"If the truth is nasty," Doris said, "a mother has to lie. I'll never tell my girl the truth about her dad."

Edgar felt shocked. "You're only imagining — what you think about my father."

Doris shrugged her shoulders. "Well, it's tough to lose — and, sometimes, it's even tougher to win."

"We — can win," Edgar said. "Hold on to me —"

"Will that be cruel?"

"Cruel?" He found her speaking so curiously that he desperately wanted to change the subject. "How about your tips? Have they been good lately?"

"Just lousy," Doris said.

"But you know how to please people."

"Do I? Well, I've got to tell the boss I'm quitting. That won't please *him*."

"Find a better place."

She was amused. "I intend to. Something like your job. When you wash dirt off your hands, it's only the dirt of money."

They watched as a swarm of children hurdled the park railings. From

the refuse cans they strewed torn papers, orange and banana peelings. Edgar turned his head in disgust.

"Ask me," Doris said. "Ask me now."

"Ask you?"

"To marry you."

/ / /

The rubbery shape of Mrs. Deen's mouth flickered open and shut. "Sluts — all of them sluts. They flirt with him at the bank — right under my nose in the street!"

The red spots on Mrs. Deen's bloated face had merged into a warm suffusion. The neighbor could believe that a crisis had been passed.

"What time is it?" Mrs. Deen snapped suddenly.

"Just five —"

/ / /

Doris stood on her firm legs. "You know my answer," she said.

Edgar nodded his head. Doris drew his hand towards her. Then, looking about at the children now boldly staring, she kissed his cheek.

"Stop by for me after work," Doris said, kindly.

In anguish, Edgar looked at his hand, which could make no gesture. He turned his face towards Doris, but suddenly all his need for her seemed to have diminished; he seemed to stand outside of himself, somehow nakedly humiliated.

Doris moved towards the street. He could only follow. They waited together for a bus to lumber past, then followed a stream of tinnily clanking cars which seemed welded into a constantly unbroken barrier. Edgar was bewildered. The game seemed to be that of winning the opposite curb where no prize of value was offered.

At the moment they reached the sidewalk, the neighbor made her appearance in a frantic rush down the flat's front steps. She spotted Edgar and let burst from her lungs an incomprehensible anguished sound.

"She's gone!" Edgar cried.

The neighbor nodded her head.

His grief was a moment's mute torment, as if his every fear in the past were now proved unalterably false. His only present fear was of a joy too brief to be realized.

Doris spoke at once. Compelled as if by a force that she trusted to sweep aside his every doubt, she cried, "There, now! There!" and pulled down his head to her breasts.

Edgar felt himself drawn closer and closer, though shrinking from her, helpless in the murky depths of all that he had ever hoped against. She held him as if with a lover's embrace, though this was the instant of relinquishing a lover's only power.

"We can take care of him," he could hear Doris saying, repeating even more strongly, "We know what to do!"

And together they climbed the steps and entered the flat to look at the dead mother in her bed.

BLACK ROOK IN RAINY WEATHER

by Sylvia Plath

On the stiff twig up there
Hunches a wet black rook
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain;
I do not expect a miracle
Or an accident

To set the sight on fire
In my eye; I seek
No more in the desultory weather some design,
But let spotted leaves fall as they fall,
Without ceremony, or portent.

Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:
A certain minor light may still
Leap incandescent

Out of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then—
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent

By bestowing largess, honor,
 One might say love. At any rate, I now walk
 Wary (for it could happen
 Even in this dull, ruinous landscape); skeptical,
 Yet politic; ignorant

Of whatever angel may choose to flare
 Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook
 Ordering its black feathers can so shine
 As to seize my senses, haul
 My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear
 Of total neutrality. With luck,
 Trekking stubborn through this season
 Of fatigue, I shall
 Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur,
 If you care to call those spasmodic
 Tricks of radiance miracles; the wait's begun again,
 The long wait for the angel,
 For that rare, random descent.

MY FRIEND, MY FRIEND

by Anne Sexton

*For M.W.K. who hesitates each time
she sees a young girl wearing The Cross.*

Who will forgive me for the things I do?
With no special legend or God to refer to,
With my calm white pedigree, my Yankee kin,
I think it would be better to be a Jew.

I forgive you for what you did not do.
I am impossibly guilty. Unlike you,
My friend, I can not blame my origin
With no special legend or God to refer to.

They wear The Crucifix as they are meant to do.
Why do their little crosses trouble you?
The effigies that I have made are genuine,
(I think it would be better to be a Jew).

Watching my mother slowly die I knew
My first release. I wish some ancient bugaboo
Followed me. But my sin is always my sin.
With no special legend or God to refer to.

Who will forgive me for the things I do?
To have your reasonable hurt to belong to
Might ease my trouble like liquor or aspirin.
I think it would be better to be a Jew.

And if I lie, I lie because I love you,
Because I am bothered by the things I do,
Because your hurt invades my calm white skin:
With no special legend or God to refer to,
I think it would be better to be a Jew.

Volume 19, Number 2 Summer 1959

Anne Sexton also had poems in these pages in fall 1959 and spring 1975.
She died in 1974.

The Third Decade
1961 – 1970



THOSE WHO HAVE BURNED

by William Dickey

Those who have burned themselves to the blood's limit,
Have kindled their tree of flesh to its fierce end,
Who appraise the guilty heartbeat, and within it
Find nothing of warmth they can willingly defend...

Those whose own hands pick at their sullen bodies
To rid themselves of the increment of time,
To slip from the icy bone its cloud of duties,
Unsheathe it into the milky, destructive lime...

Those who, in the ripe garden, find no music
But owl-call and the persuasion of the clay,
The cold rock levels sloping silently deeper
Out of the blood heat of the summer day...

Commit them to themselves, with the most final
And most generous will your hurt mind can control
That thought it had property in them. Their denial
Is of any world that wishes them well and whole.

Do them the courtesy of this hard admission,
Restrain comment, think only of what it is worth
To them to be scattered in entire division
Into the blind, unrecognizing earth.

Volume 23, Number 1 Spring 1963

William Dickey had four other poems in this same issue. He is an educator in the humanities as well as a widely published poet. He lives in San Francisco.

Cheever's Yankee Heritage

BY CYNTHIA OZICK

Volume 24, Number 2 Summer 1964

Cynthia Ozick's essays and fiction have appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies. In addition to this book review, her translation of a story by Bergelson appeared in these pages in fall 1965. She teaches at Brandeis.

The Wapshot Scandal by John Cheever (Harper & Row, 1963. \$4.95)

What is the difference between a minor and a major writer? Certainly it is not subject-matter: *The Wapshot Scandal* and *Anna Karenina* are both about adultery. Nor is it a question of control — John Cheever has an aerialist's sly command over just how taut the line of a sentence should be, and just how much power must be applied or withheld in the risk of ascent. Nor can the disparity be uncovered, finally, in any theory of what sustains an original characterization — the plain fact is that Leander Wapshot and Honora Wapshot are among those figures who continue to stand even after the novels that housed them have disintegrated into total non-recall. They outlive and overwhelm every artifact and sunset on the premises, and the reason is the premises are exactly that — not merely a farm and a house in a New England port town called St. Botolphs, but the premises and hypotheses of Cheever's idea of America. It is not that major writers work from major premises and minor writers from minor ones — Chekhov alone is evidence for the

opposite. The difference is simply this: those writers we must ultimately regard (*regard*, not *dismiss*) as minor do not believe in what they are showing us. Major writers believe. Minor writers record not societies, or even allegories of societies, but vapid dreams and pageants of desire.

Now in an earlier, pre-Wapshot era, Cheever was celebrated as our supreme cicerone and Virgil of the suburbs — conductor on those commuters' trains carrying us to that eery but fine place known as Shady Hill, and, when we arrived, canny conductor once again, this time of the ladies' cocktail orchestra hidden in the forsythia. Everyone applauded, but everyone said: "Limited. Give us more; become major," and those prosperous, self-consciously self-improving communities along the New Haven tracks, with their amiable lusts, lawns, loves, lushes, and of course their babysitters and assembly nights and conjugalities, were abandoned for nothing less than the Yankee Heritage itself. Or so it seemed — *The Wapshot Chronicle* appeared to be both a Departure and a Widening-of-Compass. That Moses and Melissa Wapshot at length settled in Proxmire Manor, Shady Hill under another name, was only accident, and irrelevant; Cheever, in moving from the short story to the novel, had given up the breadth of a finger-nail for the roominess of all the Russian steppes. And as if that were not bravery enough, we have in *The Wapshot Scandal* a sequel, suggesting perhaps an American cycle, family epic, documentary, even, of the national or free-world tone: it is true that the *Scandal* chases us all the way from a missile center (with gantries on the horizon) somewhere in the "real" American West to a sale of male prostitutes just on the other side of the Bay of Naples, where Melissa buys her old lover (who happens also to be her old grocery-boy), to Rome, where, in good Yankee-heritage, Edmund Wilson style, Honora is caught up with for nonpayment of federal taxes. The canvas looks wide enough at last — surely Shady Hill is finally too specialized to count, surely St. Botolphs is left far behind, veiled in its miasma of not-being-with-it?

But the canvas, just because it *is* so "contemporary," is deceptive; you can turn it upside-down and see something else, perhaps the very note the artist most needed to hide from himself and us — that suddenly clear figure in the abstraction which gives everything away. The *Chronicle* began overtly as an idyll, so that it might end cunningly as an idyll mocking at its own elements. But the *Scandal*, to prove its even shrewder ironies, begins with the mockery itself: Coverly Wapshot, spending the night in the empty house of his childhood, thinks he sees the ghost of Leander. "Oh, Father, Father, why have you come back?" he cries, and cries it still, even when he is safely back in the missile center which is his

home, and which, like all appurtenances of the up-to-date, is thoroughly ghost-free. — "Oh, Father, Father, why have you come back?"

The answer is that, in Cheever, Father (Father Time, in fact) always comes back because he only pretended not to be there in the first place. Cheever's suburbs are not really suburbs at all; they are a willed and altogether self-deluding reconstruction of a dream of St. Botolphs. And St. Botolphs is not really what we are meant to take it for, a dying New England village redolent of its sailing-glory days — it too is a fabrication, a sort of Norman Rockwell cover done in the manner of Braque: Cheever's deliberately wistful, self-indulgent, and sleight-of-hand dream of a ruined history and temperament. It is the history and temperament of the "quaint," commemorated and typified in fake widow's walks on top of those ubiquitous antique shoppes which seek to reproduce Our New England Legacy in places like Mojave Desert naval stations or the Florida swamps. Under this system of pretense we all landed at Plymouth Rock, and that is why Dr. Cameron, the missile master of the *Scandal*, is shamed by having to reveal that he was born not a Cameron, but a Bracciani. Cheever's Yankee Heritage, for most Americans, never existed, and even the few who are entitled to it have long ago repudiated it for the acceptable salvations of our coast-to-coast parking lot, with its separate traffic lanes for shopping carts and baby carriages. This is the supermarket America we all daily smell, and this is the America which the suburbs, those stage-sets of our grassy and decently small-town beginnings, play at forsaking and often denying. The trouble is not just homesickness, but inertricious homesickness. We long for the white clapboard house behind the picket fence, we have need of going to Grandma's for Thanksgiving, and in our plasterboard-walled version of the American Dream Past we tell each other lies about the land around us. The suburbs are not St. Botolphs, they cannot be St. Botolphs, because there is no St. Botolphs any more — and for most of us there never was. We too were born Bracciani.

All of this Cheever knows, and his knowledge is his irony — but there is no iron in it. The problem stems partly from the beauty of his prose — I can think of only four or five other novelists who match his crystal and perfectionist dedication to the weight of a word, and, except for Nabokov, they are all embossers, cameo-workers in the extreme. Cheever's is a prose on which the ironic has been forced by conscience and will: so that often enough the second half of a sentence will contrive to betray the first half — whether by anti-climax, an unexpected intrusion of the mundane or a sly shift of tonality from the oratorical to the humble,

or a shudder of fatalism suddenly laid on the glory of the perceived world."The maples and beeches had turned," he will begin, "and the moving lights of that afternoon among the trees made the path ahead of him seem like a chain of corridors and chambers, yellow and gold consistories and vaticans," and then the completion with "but in spite of this show of light he seemed still to hear the music from the television, and see the lines at Betsey's mouth and to hear the crying of his little son. He had failed. He had failed at everything." Or an elderly senator at a congressional investigatory hearing will rise and speak thus:

Come, come, let us rush to the earth. It is shaped like an egg covered with fertile seas and continents, warmed and lighted by the sun. It has churches of indescribable beauty raised to gods that have never been seen, cities whose distant roofs and smokestacks will make your heart leap, auditoriums in which people listen to music of the most serious import and thousands of museums where man's drive to celebrate life is recorded and preserved. Oh, let us rush to see this world! They have invented musical instruments to stir the finest aspirations. They have invented games to catch the hearts of the young. They have invented ceremonies to exalt the love of men and women. Oh, let us rush to see this world!

The next words are: "He sat down," and immediately afterward we learn that the witness, who is Dr. Cameron, is a sadist who has tortured his own son into idiocy. It is all chiaroscuro, all febrile play: play derived from the hints and darts of fantasy, from a yearning for the brightness that precedes disillusionment.

"This was the place where he [Coverly] had been conceived and born, where he had awakened to the excellence of life," Cheever says of St. Botolphs, "and there was some keen chagrin at finding the scene of so many dazzling memories smelling of decay; but this, he knew, was the instinctual foolishness that leads us to love permanence where there is none." This explicit rebuttal of all his charge of instruments, games, ceremonies, and exaltations of love is rare in Cheever; he eschews statement and leaves it to the falling tread of his elegiac lines. Among these his disbelief must be *detected*, for he covers everything over with a burden of beauty and sensibility. Exquisite apprehension of one's condition cancels failure; "some intensely human balance of love and misgiving" cancels brutality. Eloquence cancels all things inscrutable. All the same it is no surprise that Cheever does not believe in St. Botolphs and its cardboard replicas, including the houses and lives girdled by the gantries. He does not pretend to believe in them; he only wishes they were real. The luminiferous quality of his wishing follows his sentences like a nimbus, and in the end he fails to move because he moves us *all the time*, from moment

to moment, from poignancy to poignancy. In Cheever, even adultery is less an act than an emblem of promise and peace. In every instance rapture overwhelms chagrin; over every person and incident he throws his coruscating net of allusion: to the past, to other lives, other possibilities, other hopes — so that his novels have no unitary *now* out of which the next event can naturally rise. I mentioned Chekhov as an example of a writer who, though self-limiting, is not minor, and it is Chekhov who gives the final word on the relation of manner to emotion. For language to be moving, Chekhov said, coldness is essential — a style should always be colder than its material. Cheever's infirmity is not that he is often episodic (he progresses like a radiant yet never static medieval triptych), and not even that his people are frequently tiresome innocents (through whom he has the terrifying trick of making evil seem picturesque); but he has not heeded Chekhov. It is no use arguing that he has justified and ameliorated his nostalgia by mocking it. The mockery is weaker than the nostalgia and is in every case overcome by it. And the nostalgia, like those wagon-wheels on suburban lawns, like old Mr. Jowett, the station-master of St. Botolphs with his yellow lantern, is fraudulent and baseless, a lie told not out of malice or self-interest, but worse, out of sentiment and wholesale self-pity.

It is all a part of the American piety. It is a ritual exercise in an emptied-out culture — the so-called Yankee Heritage has no willing legatees. "Oh, Father, Father, why have you come back?" But in reality, and in America especially, he does not come back, and Cheever, in his anguish over this absence, this unyielding and mutilating absence, settles for ghosts. There is no Yankee sociology, there is no Yankee anthropology, there is only a Yankee archaeology and, perhaps, a Yankee mythology, more comic-strip cliché than compelling legend. The latter subsumes an image of a Europe ruined, brilliant, erotic, and past. It is on account of the abundant yet barren supermarket present that Cheever needs this sensuous and fertile make-believe past — how else can he complicate and enrich? Mere eccentricity, like Honora Wapshot's, will not do — eccentricity is a function of a secure and complacent society, but Cheever is so out of sorts and so out of sympathy with Happy America that he has been driven to invent a Happier America. It is a sad country where a decision — a return, a renewal, a reprieve — is made not because anything has *happened*, but because something is all at once *felt*: an epiphany of the spirit, a revelation without relevance. Smell the rain! see how the light slants! — and suddenly restoration is achieved, forgiveness flows from the spleen. It is a country so splendid and melancholy, so like

an artificial (though thoroughly artistic) rose, that anyone writing in it can measure his stature by the inchworm. Oh, it is hard to be a Yankee—if only the Wapshots were, if not Braccianis, then Wapsteins—how they might then truly suffer! And we might truly feel.

DANCERS AT BANSTEAD

by Mary Oliver

I went inside the place to find
The madmen dancing in the hall,
The witless women whirling by
Like phantoms, trailing scarves and smiles;
A little band, with lips of tin,
Kept puffing out the ancient cry:
To dance! To dance! To happiness! —
And round they went, without a pause.

At midnight when I drove away,
And back to dreams the madfolk went
Tucked in to sleep with lullaby,
I flung my questions to the air.
But nothing cared to answer me:
The dark hills humped down everywhere
With matted arms; and over all,
Full-blown and white, the neutral moon
Was dancing to another tune.

Ahead I saw the city's lights
And thought, if earth can only wait
Another thousand thousand nights,
Surely this grief will balance out
In some unguessed nativity.
Meanwhile, indeed, the nights are long,
And there is little we can do,
Except to let the dancers dance;
Except to know the moon is wrong.

Volume 24, Number 4 Winter 1964

Mary Oliver also had a poem in the winter 1968-69 issue. Her book of poems, *House of Light*, was published in 1990. She has contributed to various magazines.

A Happy Family

BY WILLIAM TREVOR

Volume 27, Number 1 Spring 1967

William Trevor also had a story in these pages in summer 1967.

His *Two Lives* was published this year by Viking.

On the evening of Tuesday, May 24, 1962, I returned home in the usual way. I remember sitting in the Number 73 bus, thinking of the day as I had spent it and thinking of the house I was about to enter. It was a fine evening, warm and mellow, the air heavy with the smell of London. The bus crossed Hammersmith Bridge, moving quite quickly towards the leafy avenues beyond. The houses of the suburbs were gayer in that evening's sunshine, pleasanter abodes than often they seemed.

"Hullo," I said in the hall of ours, speaking to my daughter Bridget, a child of one, who happened to be standing there. She was wearing her nightdress and she didn't look sleepy. "Aren't you going to bed?" I said, and Bridget didn't answer. She looked at me as though she had forgotten that I was closely related to her. I could hear Anna and Christopher in the bathroom, talking loudly and rapidly; and I could hear Elizabeth's voice urging them to wash themselves properly and to be quick about it. "She has lovely clothes, Miss MacAdam has," Christopher was saying. "Hasn't she, Anna?" Miss MacAdams was a woman who taught at their school, a woman about whom we had come to know a lot. "Jerseys," said Anna, "if you can call jerseys lovely."

Looking back now, such exchanges come easily to my mind. Bits of conversations float to the surface without much of a continuing pattern, and without any significance that I can see. I suppose we were a happy

family: someone examining us might possibly have written that down on a report sheet, the way these things are done. Yet what I recall most vividly now when I think of us as a family are images and occasions that for Elizabeth and me were neither happy nor unhappy. I remember animals at the zoo coming forward for the offerings of our children, smelling of confinement rather than the jungle, seeming fierce and hard-done-by. I remember birthday parties on warm afternoons, the figures of children moving swiftly from the garden to the house, creatures who might have been bored, with paper hats on their heads or in their hands, seeking adventure in forbidden rooms. I remember dawdling walks, arguments that came to involve all of us, and other days when everything went well.

I used to leave the house at half-past eight every morning, and often during the day I imagined what my wife's day must have been like. She told me, of course. She told me about how ill-tempered our children had been, or how tractable; about how the time had passed in other ways, whom she had met and spoken to, who had come to tea or whom she had visited. I imagined her in summer, having lunch in the garden when it was warm, dozing afterwards and being awakened by Bridget. In turn, she would ask me how the hours had gone for me, and I would say a thing or two about their passing, about the people who had filled them. "Miss Madden is leaving us," I can remember myself saying. "Off to Buenos Aires for some reason." In my memory of this, I seem to be repeating the information. "Off to Buenos Aires," I appear to be saying. "Off to Buenos Aires. Miss Madden." And a little later I am saying it again, adding that Miss Madden would be missed. Elizabeth's head is nodding, agreeing that that would indeed be so. "I fell asleep in the garden," Elizabeth is murmuring in this small vision. "Bridget woke me up."

My wife was pretty when I married her and as the years passed it seemed to me that she took on a greater beauty. I believed that this was some reflection of her contentment and she may even have believed it herself. Had she suddenly said otherwise I'd have been puzzled — as puzzled as I was, and as she was, on the evening of May 24, when she told me about Mr. Higgs. She sat before me then, sipping at a glass of sherry that I'd poured her and remembering all the details: all that Mr. Higgs had said, and all that she had said in reply.

She had been listening to a story on the radio and making coffee. Christopher and Anna were at school; in the garden Bridget was asleep in her pram. When the telephone rang Elizabeth walked towards it slowly, still listening to the wireless. When she said "Hullo," she heard the coins drop at the other end and a man's voice said, "Mrs. Farrel?"

Elizabeth said yes, she was Mrs. Farrel, and the man said, “My name is Higgs.”

His voice was ordinary, a little uneducated, the kind of voice that is always drifting over the telephone.

“A very good friend,” said Mr. Higgs.

“Good morning,” said Elizabeth in her matter-of-fact way. “Are you selling something, Mr. Higgs?”

“In a sense, Mrs. Farrel, in a sense. You might call it selling. Do I peddle salvation?”

“Oh, I am not religious in the least — ”

“It may be your trouble, Mrs. Farrel.”

“Yes, well — ”

“You are Elizabeth Farrel. You have three children.”

“Mr. Higgs — ”

“Your father was a Captain Maugham. Born 1892, died 1959. He lost a leg in action and never forgave himself for it. You attended his funeral, but were glad that he was dead, since he had a way of upsetting your children. Your mother, seventy-four a week ago, lives near St. Albans and is unhappy. You have two sisters and a brother.”

“Mr. Higgs, what do you want?”

“Nothing. I don’t want anything. What do *you* want, Mrs. Farrel?”

“Look here, Mr. Higgs — ”

“D’you remember your tenth birthday? D’you remember what it felt like being a little girl of ten, in a white dress spotted with forget-me-not, and a blue ribbon tying back your hair? You were taken on a picnic. ‘You’re ten years old,’ your father said. ‘Now tell us what you’re going to do with yourself.’ ‘She must cut the chocolate cake first,’ your mother cried, and so you cut the cake and then stood up and announced the trend of your ambitions. Your brother Ralph laughed, and was scolded by your father. D’you remember at all?”

Elizabeth did remember. She remembered playing hide-and-seek with her sisters after tea; she remembered Ralph climbing a tree and finding himself unable to get down again. She remembered her parents quarrelling, as they invariably did, all the way home.

“Do I know you, Mr. Higgs? How do you manage to have these details of my childhood?”

Mr. Higgs laughed. It wasn’t a nasty laugh. It sounded reassuring, as if Mr. Higgs meant no harm.

On the evening of May 24 we sat for a long time wondering who the odd individual could be and what he was after. Elizabeth seemed nerv-

ously elated, and naturally more than a little intrigued. I, on the other hand, was rather upset by this Mr. Higgs and his deep mine of information. "If he rings again," I said, "threaten him with the police."

/ / /

"Good morning, Mrs. Farrel."

"Mr. Higgs?"

"My dear."

"Well then, Mr. Higgs, explain."

"Ho, ho, Mrs. Farrel, there's a sharpness for you. Explain? Why? If I explained I'd be out of business in no time at all. 'So that's it,' you'd say, and ring off, just like I was a salesman or a Jehovah's Witness."

"Mr. Higgs —"

"You was a little girl of ten, Mrs. Farrel. You was out on a picnic. Remember?"

"How did you know all that?"

"Why shouldn't I know, for heaven's sake? Listen now, Mrs. Farrel. Did you think then what you would be today? Did you see yourself married to a man and mothering his children? Have you come to a sticky end, or otherwise?"

"A sticky end?"

"You clean his house, you prepare his meals, you take his opinions. You hear on the radio some news of passing importance, some bomb exploded, some army recalled. Who does the thinking, Mrs. Farrel? You react as he does. You've lost your identity. Did you think of that, that day when you was ten? Your children will be ten one day. They'll stand before you at ten years of age, first the girl, then the boy. What of their futures, Mrs. Farrel? Shall they make something of themselves? Shall they fail and be miserable? Shall they be unnatural and unhappy, or sick in some way, or perhaps too stupid? Or shall they all three of them be richly successful? Are you successful, Mrs. Farrel? You are your husband's instrument. You were different at ten, Mrs. Farrel. How about your children? Soon it'll be your turn to take on the talking. I'll listen like I was paid for it."

I was aware of considerable pique when Elizabeth reported all this to me. I protested that I was not given to forcing my opinions on others, and Elizabeth said I wasn't either. "Clearly, he's queer in the head," I said. I paused, thinking about that, then said, "Could he be someone like a window-cleaner to whom you once perhaps talked of your childhood? Although I can't see you doing it."

Elizabeth shook her head; she said she didn't remember talking to a window-cleaner about her childhood, or about anything very much. We'd had the same window-cleaners for almost seven years, she reminded me: two honest, respectable men who arrived at the house every six weeks in a Ford motor-car. "Well, he must be someone," I said. "Someone you've talked to. I mean, it's not guesswork."

"Maybe he's wicked," said Elizabeth. "Maybe he's a small wicked man with very white skin, driven by some force he doesn't understand. Perhaps he's one of those painters who came last year to paint the hall. There was a little man —"

"That little man's name was Mr. Gipe. I remember that well. 'Gipe,' he said walking into the hall and saying it would be a long job. 'Gipe, sir; an unusual name.'"

"He could be calling himself Higgs. He could have read through my letters. And my old diaries. Perhaps Mr. Gipe expected a tip."

"The hall cost ninety pounds."

"I know, but it didn't all go to Mr. Gipe. Perhaps nobody tips poor Mr. Gipe and perhaps now he's telephoning all the wives, having read through their letters and their private diaries. He telephones to taunt them and to cause trouble, being a wicked man. Perhaps Mr. Gipe is possessed of a devil."

I frowned and shook my head. "Not at all," I said. "It's a voice from the past. It's someone who really did know you when you were ten, and knows all that's happened since."

"More likely Mr. Gipe," said Elizabeth, "guided from hell."



"Daddy, am I asleep?"

I looked at her wide eyes, big and blue and clear, like perfect replicas of her mother's. I loved Anna best of all of them; I suppose because she reminded me so much of Elizabeth.

"No, darling, you're not asleep. If you were asleep you couldn't be talking to me, now could you?"

"I could be dreaming, Daddy. Couldn't I be dreaming?"

"Yes, I suppose you could."

"But I'm not, am I?"

I shook my head. "No, Anna, you're not dreaming."

She sighed. "I'm glad. I wouldn't like to be dreaming. I wouldn't like to suddenly wake up."

It was Sunday afternoon and we had driven into the country. We did

it almost every Sunday when the weather was fine and warm. The children enjoyed it and so in a way did we; even though the woods we went to were rather tatty, too near London to seem real, too untidy with sweet-papers to be attractive. Still, it was a way of entertaining them.

“Elizabeth.”

She was sitting on a tree stump, her eyes half closed. On a rug at her feet Bridget was playing with some wooden beads. I sat beside her and put my arm about her shoulders. “Elizabeth.”

She jumped a little. “Hullo, darling. I was almost asleep.”

“You were thinking about Mr. Higgs.”

“Oh, I wasn’t. My mind was a blank; I was about to drop off. I can do it now, sitting upright like this.”

“Anna asked me if she was dreaming.”

“Where is she?”

“Playing with Christopher.”

“They’ll begin to fight. They don’t play any more. Why do they perpetually fight?”

I said it was just a phase, but Elizabeth said she thought they would always fight now. The scratching and snarling would turn to argument as they grew older, and when they became adults they wouldn’t ever see one another. They would say that they had nothing in common, and would admit to others that they really disliked one another, and always had. Elizabeth said she could see them: Christopher married to an unsuitable woman, and Anna as a girl who lived promiscuously and did not marry at all. Anna would become a heavy drinker of whisky and would smoke slim cigars at forty.

“Heavens,” I said, staring at her, and then looking at the small figure of Anna. “Why on earth are you saying all that?”

“Well, it’s true. I mean, it’s what I imagine. I can see Anna in a harsh red suit, getting drunk at a cocktail party. I can see Christopher being miserable — ”

“This is your Mr. Higgs again. Look, the police can arrange to have the telephone tapped. It’s sheer nonsense that some raving lunatic should be allowed to go on like that.”

“Mr. Higgs! Mr. Higgs! What’s Mr. Higgs got to do with it? You’ve got him on the brain.”

Elizabeth walked away. She left me sitting there, with her frightening images of our children. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that Bridget was eating a piece of wood. I took it from her. Anna was saying, “Daddy, Christopher hurt me.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. He just hurt me.”

“How did he hurt you?”

“He pushed me and I fell.” She began to cry, so I comforted her. I called Christopher and told him he mustn’t push Anna. They ran off to play again and a moment later Anna was saying: “Daddy, Christopher pushed me.”

“Christopher, you mustn’t push Anna. And you shouldn’t have to be told everything twice.”

“I didn’t push her. She fell.”

Anna put her thumb in her mouth. I glanced through the trees to see where Elizabeth had got to, but there was no sign of her. I made the children sit on the rug and told them a story. They didn’t like it much. They never did like my stories: Elizabeth’s were so much better.

“I’m sorry.” She stood looking down on us, as tall and beautiful as a goddess.

“You look like a goddess,” I said.

“What’s a goddess?” Anna asked, and Christopher said, “Why’s Mummy sorry?”

“A goddess is a beautiful lady. Mummy’s sorry because she left me to look after you. And it’s time to go home.”

“Oh, oh, oh, I must find Mambi first,” Anna cried anxiously. Mambi was a faithful friend who accompanied her everywhere she went, but who was, at the moment of departures, almost always lost.

We walked to the car. Anna said, “Mambi was at the top of an old tree. Mambi’s a goddess too. Daddy, do you *have* to be beautiful to be a goddess?”

“I suppose so.”

“Then Mambi can’t be.”

“Isn’t Mambi beautiful?”

“Usually she is. Only she’s not now.”

“Why isn’t she now?”

“Because all her hair came off in the tree.”

The car heaved and wobbled all the way home as Christopher and Anna banged about in the back. When they fought we shouted at them, and then they sulked and there was a mile or so of peace. Anna began to cry as I turned into the garage. Mambi, she said, was cold without her hair. Elizabeth explained about wigs.

I woke up in the middle of the night, thinking about Mr. Higgs. I kept seeing the man as a shrimpish little thing, like the manager of the shop where we hired our television set. He had a black mustache, like a length of thread stuck across his upper lip. I knew it was wrong: I knew this wasn't Mr. Higgs at all; and then, all of a sudden, I began to think about Elizabeth's brother Ralph.

A generation ago Ralph would have been called a remittance man. Just about the time we were married old Captain Maugham had packed him off to a farm in Kenya, after an incident with a hotel receptionist and the hotel's account books. But caring for nothing in Kenya, Ralph had made his way to Cairo and from Cairo on the long-distance telephone he had greeted the captain with a request for financial aid. He didn't get it, and then the war broke out and Ralph disappeared. Whenever we thought of him we imagined that he was up to the most reprehensible racket he could lay his hands on. If he was, we never found out about it. All we did know was that after the war he again telephoned the captain, and the odd thing was that he was still in Cairo. "I have lost a leg," Captain Maugham told him testily. "And I," said Ralph, "have lost the empire of my soul." He was given to this kind of decorated statement; it interfered so much with his conversation that most of the time you didn't know what he was talking about. But the captain sent him some money and an agreement was drawn up by which Ralph, on receipt of a monthly cheque, promised not to return to England during his father's lifetime. Then the captain died and Ralph was back. I gave him fifty pounds and all in all he probably cleaned up quite well. Ralph wasn't the sort of person to write letters; we had no idea where he was now. As a school-boy, and even later, he was a great one for playing practical jokes. He was certainly a good enough mimic to create Mr. Higgs. Just for fun, I wondered? Or in some kind of bitterness? Or did he in some ingenious way hope to extract money?

The following morning I telephone Elizabeth's sisters. Daphne knew nothing about where Ralph was, what he was doing, or anything about him. She said she hoped he wasn't coming back to England because it had cost her fifty pounds the last time. Margaret, however, knew a lot. She didn't want to talk about it on the telephone so I met her for lunch. "What's all this?" she said.

I told her about Mr. Higgs and the vague theory that was beginning to crystallize in my mind. She was intrigued with the Higgs thing. "I don't know why," she said, "but it rings a queer sort of bell. But you're quite wrong about Ralph." Ralph, it appeared, was being paid by Marga-

ret and her husband in much the same way as he had been paid by the captain, for the same reason and with the same stipulation. “Only for the time being,” Margaret said a little bitterly. “When Mother dies Ralph can do what he damn well likes. But it was quite a serious business and the news of it would clearly finish her. One doesn’t like to think of an old woman dying in that particular kind of misery.”

“But whatever it was, she’d probably never find out.”

“Oh yes, she would. She reads the papers. In any case, Ralph is quite capable of dropping her a little note. But at the moment I can assure you that Ralph is safe in Africa. He’s not the type to take any chances with his gift horses.”

So that was that. It made me feel even worse about Mr. Higgs that my simple explanation had been so easily exploded.



“Well,” I said, “and what did he have to say today?”

“What did who say?”

“Higgs.”

“Nothing much. He’s becoming a bore.”

She wasn’t going to tell me any more. She wasn’t going to talk about Mr. Higgs because she didn’t trust me. She thought I’d put the police on him and she didn’t want that, so she said, because she had come to feel sorry for the poor crazed creature or whatever it was he happened to be. In fact, I thought to myself, my wife has become in some way fascinated by this man.

I worked at home one day, waiting for the telephone call. There was a ring at eleven fifteen. I heard Elizabeth answer it. She said, “No, I’m sorry; I’m afraid you’ve got the wrong number.” I didn’t ask her about Mr. Higgs. When I looked at her she seemed a long way away and her voice was measured and polite. There was some awful shaft between us and I didn’t know what to do about it.

In the afternoon I took the children for a walk in the park.

“Mambi’s gone to stay in the country,” Anna said. “I’m lonely without her.”

“Well, she’s coming back tonight, isn’t she?”

“Daddy,” Christopher said, “what’s the matter with Mummy?”



I’m not very sure when it was that I first noticed everything was in rather a mess. I remember coming in one night and stumbling over lots of

wooden toys in the hall. Quite often the cornflakes packet and the marmalade were still on the kitchen table from breakfast. Or if they weren't on the table the children had got them onto the floor and Bridget had covered most of the house with their mixed contents. Elizabeth didn't seem to notice. She sat in a dream, silent and alone, forgetting to cook the supper. The children began to do all the things they had ever wanted to do and which Elizabeth had patiently prevented, like scribbling on the walls and playing in the coal cellar. I tried to discuss it with Elizabeth but all she did was to smile sweetly and say she was tired.

"Why don't you see a doctor?"

She stared at me. "A doctor?"

"Perhaps you need a tonic." And at that point she would smile again and go to bed.

I knew that Elizabeth was still having her conversations with Mr. Higgs, even though she no longer mentioned them. When I asked her she used to laugh and say, "Poor Mr. Higgs was just some old fanatic."

"Yes, but how did he —?"

"Darling, you worry too much."

I went to St. Albans to see old Mrs. Maugham, without very much hope. I don't know what I expected of her, since she was obviously too deaf and too senile to offer me anything at all. She lived with a woman called Miss Awpit who was employed by the old woman's children to look after her. Miss Awpit made us tea and did the interpreting.

"Mr. Farrel wants to know how you are, dear," Miss Awpit said. "Quite well, really," Miss Awpit said to me. "All things being equal."

Mrs. Maugham knew who I was and all that. She asked after Elizabeth and the children. She said something to Miss Awpit, and Miss Awpit said, "She wants you to bring them to see her."

"Yes, yes," I shouted, nodding hard. "We shall come and see you soon. They often," I lied, "ask about Granny."

"Hark at that," shouted Miss Awpit, nudging the old lady, who snappishly told her to leave off.

I didn't quite know how to put it. I said, "Ask her if she knows a Mr. Higgs."

Miss Awpit, imagining I suppose that I was making conversation, shouted, "Mr. Farrel wants to know if you know Mr. Higgs."

Mrs. Maugham smiled at us. "Higgs," Miss Awpit repeated. "Do you know Mr. Higgs at all, dear?"

"Never," said Mrs. Maugham.

"Have you ever known a Mr. Higgs?" I shouted.

“Higgs?” said Mrs. Maugham.

“Do you know him?” Miss Awpit asked. “Do you know a Mr. Higgs?”

“I do not,” said Mrs. Maugham, suddenly in command of herself, “know anyone of such a name. Nor would I wish to.”

“Look, Mrs. Maugham,” I pursued, “does the name mean anything at all to you?”

“I have told you, I do not know your friend. How can I be expected to know your friends, an old woman like me, stuck out here in St. Albans with no one to look after me?”

“Come, come,” said Miss Awpit, “you’ve got me, dear.”

But Mrs. Maugham only laughed.



A week or two passed, and then one afternoon as I was sitting in the office filing my nails the telephone rang and a voice I didn’t recognize said, “Mr. Farrel?”

I said yes, and the voice said, “This is Miss Awpit. You know, Mrs. Maugham’s Miss Awpit.”

“Of course. Good morning, Miss Awpit. How are you?”

“Very well, thank you. I’m ringing you to tell you something about Mrs. Maugham.”

“Yes?”

“Well you know when you came here the other week you were asking about a Mr. Higgs?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, as you sounded rather anxious about him, I just thought I’d tell you. I thought about it and then I decided. I’ll ring Mr. Farrel, I said, just to tell him what she said.”

“Yes, Miss Awpit?”

“I hope I’m doing the right thing.”

“What did Mrs. Maugham say?”

“Well, it’s funny in a way. I hope you won’t think I’m being very stupid or anything.”

I had the odd feeling that Miss Awpit was going to die as she was speaking, before she could tell me. I said, “I assure you; you are doing the right thing. What did Mrs. Maugham say?”

“Well, it was at breakfast one morning. She hadn’t had a good night at all. So she said, but you know what it’s like with old people. I mean, quite frankly I had to get up myself in the night and I heard her sleeping

as deep and sweet as you'd wish. Honestly, Mr. Farrel, I often wish I had her constitution myself — ”

“You were telling me about Mr. Higgs.”

“I'm sorry?”

“You were telling me about Mr. Higgs.”

“Well, it's nothing, really. You'll probably laugh when you hear. Quite honestly I was in two minds whether or not to bother you. You see, all Mrs. Maugham said was: ‘It's funny that man suddenly talking about Mr. Higgs like that. You know, Ethel, I haven't heard Mr. Higgs mentioned for almost thirty years.’ So I said yes, leading her on, you see. ‘And who was Mr. Higgs, dear, thirty years ago?’ And she said: ‘Oh, nobody at all. He was just Elizabeth's little friend.’ ”

“Elizabeth's?”

“Just what I said, Mr. Farrel. She got quite impatient with me. ‘Just someone Elizabeth used to talk to,’ she said, ‘when she was three. You know the way children invent things.’ ”

“Like Mambi,” I said, not meaning to say it, since Miss Awpit wouldn't understand.

“Oh dear, Mr. Farrel,” said Miss Awpit, “I knew you'd laugh.”

I left the office and took a taxi all the way home. Elizabeth was in the garden. I sat beside her and held her hands. “Look,” I said. “Let's have a holiday. Let's go away, just the two of us. We need a rest.”

“You're spying on me,” Elizabeth said. “Which isn't new, I suppose. You've got so mean, darling, ever since you became jealous of poor Mr. Higgs. How could you be jealous of a man like Mr. Higgs?”

“Elizabeth, I know who Mr. Higgs is. I can tell you — ”

“There's nothing to be jealous about. All the poor creature does is to ring me up and tell me all the things he's read in my diaries the time he came to paint the hall. And then he tries to comfort me about the children. He tells me not to worry about Bridget. But I can't help worrying because I know she's going to have a hard time. She's going to grow big and lumpy, poor little Bridget, and she's not going to be ever able to pass an exam, and in the end she'll go and work in a post office. But Mr. Higgs — ”

“Let me tell you about Mr. Higgs. Let me just remind you.”

“You don't know him, darling. You've never spoken to him. Mr. Higgs is very patient, you know. First of all, he did all the talking, and now, you see, he kindly allows me. Poor Mr. Higgs is the inmate of a home. He's an institutionalized person, darling. There's no need to be jealous at all.”

I said nothing. I sat there holding her two hands and looking at her. Her face was just the same; even her eyes betrayed no hint of the confusion that held her. She smiled when she spoke of Mr. Higgs. She made a joke, laughing, calling him the housewife's friend.

"It was funny," she said, "the first time I saw Christopher as an adult sitting in a room with that awful woman. She was leaning back in a chair, staring at him and attempting to torture him with words. And then there was Anna, half a mile away across London, in a house in a square. All the lights were on because of the party, and Anna was in that red suit, and she was laughing and saying how she hated Christopher, how she had hated him from the first moment she saw him. And when she said that I couldn't remember what moment she meant. I couldn't quite remember where it was that Anna and Christopher had met. Well, it goes to show." Elizabeth paused. "Well, doesn't it?" she said. "I mean, imagine my thinking that poor Mr. Higgs was wicked! The kindest, most long-suffering man that ever walked on two legs. Well, I mean all I had to do was to remind Mr. Higgs that I'd forgotten and Mr. Higgs could tell me. 'They met in a garden,' he could say. 'At an ordinary little tea-party.' And Bridget was operated on several times and counted the words in telegrams."

Elizabeth talked on of the children and of Mr. Higgs. I rang up our doctor and he came, and then a little later my wife was taken from the house. I sat alone with Bridget on my knee until it was time to go and fetch Christopher and Anna. "Mummy's ill," I said in the car. "She's had to go away for a little." I would tell them the story gradually and one day perhaps we might visit her and she might still understand who we were. "Ill?" they said. "But Mummy's never ill." I stopped the car by our house, thinking that only death could make the house seem so empty, and thinking too that death was easier to understand. We made tea, I remember, the children and I, not saying very much more.

Mediations

BY JAMES ARONSON

Volume 29, Number 4 Winter 1969-70

James Aronson contributed other "Mediations" to this journal in fall '69 and the volumes of 1970-71 and 1971-72. He died in 1988.

"You must fight against any effort by any government — that would make any effort (God knows I don't think the Nixon government would ever do it) to try to influence your judgments." — Frank J. Shakespeare, Jr., director of the U.S. Information Agency, in an address to the Radio-Television News Directors Association, 26 September 1969.

God knows the Nixon government did do it, just a few weeks after Shakespeare's fervent interjection, and the effort — described by some amused and truly unimaginative onlookers as "The Spiro Agnew Show" — set off a furor. The government's assault was directed first at television and radio, as the most vulnerable targets of news management through intimidation, and was extended, after a brief pause for station identification, to the press — particularly the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

The government assault was carefully prepared and timed by the administration, and it had three results: (1) a flurry of indignant and defiant editorials in the nation's press — some of them of high quality — restating the constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press, and statements by the heads of the television networks — of varying quality — declaring in essence that the networks would not be intimidated; (2) a sandstorm of telephone calls, letters, and telegrams in support of the Agnew-Nixon position, indicating that the president's call to arms of the "silent majority" in his speech of 3 November 1969 had been effective;

(3) evidence — in the volume and “balance” of the coverage of the Agnew speeches and the reaction to them — that the administration had to an extent succeeded in its purpose.

What was the purpose? In the long range, to achieve by pressure and threat of indirect control what the administration cannot do by legislation; in the short range, inhibition of the coverage of the 15 November anti-war Mobilization in Washington, and of the anti-war demonstrations in general. There was no live television coverage of the Mobilization by any network. *Variety* reported that the networks decided on their own in advance against live coverage, but the first Agnew speech guaranteed that the decision would not be reversed by an industry not noted for spine.

In the last analysis, as Nixon knows, the forces that control the nation’s press and the television networks have no fundamental quarrel with the American system. If they become restless, as they have about the war in Vietnam, when called to order they bend backwards to demonstrate their fairness, and thereby depress an already lopsided balance further in favor of the status quo.

A striking example of how this response is implemented, sometimes to excess, by second-echelon editors, was provided by *Newsday* of Long Island, one of the most successful suburban dailies (circulation 450,000) in the United States. Its publisher is Bill D. Moyers, who was press secretary to President Johnson. *Newsday* does not publish on Sunday, so its first issue covering the Washington Mobilization was dated Monday, 17 November 1969.

The first edition of that day’s paper carried this page-one headline: “‘Silent Majority’ Gathers for Outspoken LI Rally.” A subhead read: “Meanwhile on the other side of the Vietnam issue, leaders of the massive war protest in Washington during the weekend rule out a repeat performance for the immediate future. Pages 2, 3 and 4.” Below the headlines were two photographs, one showing men in veterans’ organization caps holding aloft pictures of Nixon and signs reading “Support Nixon”; the other, people waving American flags.

I learned that an executive reporting to work after the first edition had gone to press was mortified by the incredible news judgment demonstrated by the page-one makeup — blatant bias aside — and ordered a complete remake. The revised page-one headline then read: “Leaders of Huge Protest Planning No Encore Soon.” The subhead said: “Leaders of the greatest protest gathering in U.S. history, which attracted at least 250,000 demonstrators to Washington during the weekend, rule out a

repeat performance for the immediate future. On Long Island, the 'Silent Majority' sounds off. Pages 2, 3 and 4." Below the headline was a single picture: an impressive panorama shot of the vast crowd around the Washington Monument.

The *Newsday* story is especially pertinent because publisher Moyers took part in at least two post-mortem television panels about the Agnew speeches. Referring to the 3 November speech by Nixon, and recalling his own White House days, he said: "To give a president, who remains a politician at all times, thirty minutes of uninterrupted and unanswered access to sixty million Americans is too great power to give to any man. I worried . . . that perhaps, at times, we were getting across too well." At *Newsday*, apparently, Nixon came through loud and clear — at least for one edition.

That same day the story of the Songmy Massacre broke into print and the Agnew controversy began to recede until, by Thanksgiving, it had all but disappeared from the press and from television. The nation was convulsed in a spasm of soul-searching, such as follow our periodic assassinations, but not one newspaper or television network suggested that the most effective way to purge the national guilt in the wanton murder of 500 women, children, and old men, would be to end the war immediately and bring home the young soldiers who had become so dehumanized by the terror of this American-imposed war. The *New York Times*, which had published an instant indignant editorial upon the arrest of four suspects in the anti-establishment bombings in New York, took five days to produce an editorial on Songmy.

I do not mean to minimize the gravity of the attempt by the Nixon administration to stifle criticism of the government. Whether the agent is Agnew, or Dean Burch, the reactionary new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, or White House communications coordinator Herbert Klein, who once edited a dreadful newspaper in San Diego, or the junior Shakespeare and his inclination to un-Elizabethan activities, it is entirely reprehensible and ought to be countered at every level of publication and communication. But it is not a new effort, and the fact that it could be made with such vigor in the 188th year of the Bill of Rights indicates that the Nixon administration has a fair knowledge of the history of Cold War journalism. It would be instructive to review for a new generation how some of Agnew's primary targets reacted in similar situations in the Cold War years.

Some Defenders of the Faith

Senator Joe McCarthy burst onto page one of the nation's newspapers on 10 February 1950 with his famous speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, in which he waved before the audience a list of purported Communists in the State Department — and for almost four years thereafter he rarely left page one. It was a measure of McCarthy's satisfaction with his treatment by the press that his first major confrontation with the newspapers did not occur until the spring of 1953.

The occasion was a subpoena from the McCarthy Subcommittee on Government Operations to James Wechsler, the editor of the *New York Post*. The ostensible reason for the summons was the presence of books by Wechsler on the shelves of State Department libraries overseas. The real reason was a seventeen-part series in the *Post* about McCarthy entitled: "Smear, Inc. — A One Man Job," published a year before, and the *Post's* continuing criticism of McCarthy's methods.

At a hearing on 24 April 1953, five minutes were spent on Wechsler's books and five hours on his views, the policies of the *Post*, and criticism of McCarthy. McCarthy made much of Wechsler's membership in the Young Communist League from 1934 to 1937 — hardly a revelation, since Wechsler had been at great pains since 1937 to make public his break with communism, and had long been accepted in the newspaper industry as a vigorous opponent of communism. At the hearing Wechsler presented as evidence to this effect a letter of commendation, for an editorial he had written on the case of Alger Hiss, from Representative Richard M. Nixon.

But for all his insistence that McCarthy was actually hindering the fight against communism, Wechsler was firm on McCarthy's invasion of the freedom of the press. "I believe," he said, "the object of this proceeding is . . . a reprisal against the *Post* for its fight against the chairman of this committee. I believe I would not be here if I were not the editor of the *Post* and I did not engage in such a fight."

It was, of course, an accurate summary. Wechsler asked that the testimony be made public so that he might submit it to the American Society of Newspaper Editors for an inquiry into a violation of the freedom of the press. It *was* made public, but only after Wechsler had submitted to the committee (at McCarthy's insistence to "complete the testimony") a list of names of persons he had known to be Communists between 1934 and 1937. The decision involved a "grave issue of con-

science,” Wechsler said, but he felt the paramount issue was freedom of the press.

Several newspapers were moved to editorial support of Wechsler’s charges against McCarthy (after finding Wechsler untainted of the charge of communism and, therefore, defensible). The *Times* said it was clear that McCarthy was using his right of investigation “as a cover for an attempt to harass and intimidate Mr. Wechsler as an editor.”

The transcript went to the ASNE, and in August 1953 a report was rendered by a special committee of inquiry. The eleven members were unable to agree whether freedom of the press had been infringed. It was a tortured statement in which all members of the ASNE were urged to read the transcript of the testimony and judge for themselves. There was also a word of advice, to any editor who might be subpoenaed, about answering questions relating to his editorial or news judgment: consult a lawyer beforehand.

Four committee members, however, including the chairman, J. R. Wiggins, then managing editor of the *Washington Post*, felt the report was inadequate and submitted statements “clarifying their views.” Their views were strong and their language eloquent. They saw a clear threat to freedom of the press in the Wechsler inquiry and said frequent repetition of this kind of thing would extinguish freedom without the passage of a law. In a section prophetic of the Agnew controversy, they said that if newspapers were forced to account to government agencies for their news and editorial policies, they “would exist in such permanent jeopardy that their freedom to report fully and comment freely inevitably would be impaired.”

In a memorable passage they declared that the right of the people to know and to criticize their government suffers “whenever a single newspaper, however worthy or unworthy, is subjected by one Senator, however worthy or unworthy, to inconvenience, expense, humiliation, ridicule, abuse, condemnation, and reproach, under the auspices of government power.” In a boldface final paragraph, the dissenters were entirely unequivocal:

Newspapermen, by the very choice of their profession, avail themselves of the privilege and immunities of a free press . . . and they assume at the same time obligations and duties, not the least among which is to defend freedom of the press against all attack. Where such an invasion of freedom occurs . . . the silence of the press is invariably construed, and properly construed, as an indication that no trespass has occurred and its silences inevitably will be summoned to the support of like trespasses in the future. . . . Whatever inconvenience results, whatever controversy ensues, we are compelled by

every command of duty to brand this and every threat to freedom of the press, from whatever sources, as a peril to American freedom.

McCarthy's response was typically insolent. He wrote to the seven other members of the special ASNE committee offering his full cooperation in an investigation of Wiggins and the extent to which he had, through the *Washington Post*, "prostituted and endangered freedom of the press by constant, false, vicious, intemperate attacks upon anyone who dares expose any of the undercover Communists." The response of the press was also typical: it gave more space to McCarthy's attack on Wiggins and the *Washington Post* than it had given to the findings of the ASNE committee.

A Heretic

The principles set forth by the dissenting editors were soon put to the test. They were not upheld. I had painful personal experience of the failure when, with Cedric Belfrage, editor of the *National Guardian*, I was next in line after Wechsler at the McCarthy committee. I was then executive editor of the *National Guardian*.

Belfrage had been subpoenaed early in May 1953 to a hearing before the House Committee on Un-American Activities — shortly after publication in the *National Guardian* of a series of articles presenting new evidence in the case of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg (then six weeks away from execution) charging perjury in prosecuting testimony. The campaign to save the Rosenbergs, in which the *National Guardian* was a spearhead, was at its peak. Chairman Harold Velde in an opening statement at the HUAC hearing made it plain that his purpose was to silence the newspaper.

The editors of the *National Guardian* in a public statement underscored this purpose and characterized the hearing as an infringement on the freedom of the press. The statement was given to all newspapers in New York and to the wire services. No daily newspapers used any part of it. A rally in support of Belfrage on the eve of the hearing was not covered. The *New York Post*, whose editor had just described his own subpoena to the McCarthy committee as "a flagrant attempt to intimidate editors," ignored Belfrage's summons to the Un-American Activities Committee.

Belfrage and I appeared before the McCarthy committee on May 14

(after a private session on May 13). The nightmare of the hearing — insults, threats of perjury and contempt citations, and humiliation — under the rules of a virtual inquisition failed to dissipate our determination not to answer any questions about our political beliefs and our associations. We testified freely about our newspaper careers prior to the *National Guardian*. The hearing was well covered by the press. Among the reporters were many with whom I had worked on other papers in the past, and I asked several of them to meet with Belfrage and me after the hearing to answer for them questions we would refuse to answer before the committee.

We informed the few who did come that we were not Communist party members, but considered it our right and our duty to remain silent before a committee of Congress which had no authority to inquire into our beliefs and associations. Only the *New York Times* printed the bare bones of what we told the reporters, adding the dates of my employment on the *Times*, and the exact date of my resignation.

On May 15 in New York, Belfrage, a British citizen but for twenty-five years a resident of the United States, was arrested and taken to Ellis Island on a deportation warrant under the Walter-McCarran Act. At McCarthy's insistence, an Immigration Department agent had been present at his testimony. He was released in bond four weeks later, restricted to the the island of Manhattan. In December 1954 he was ordered deported and, in August 1955, after a long struggle in which he spent three additional months without charge in prison, he accepted deportation to England. This skeletal rendition of the Belfrage story does no justice to the vigorous battle that was waged to permit him to remain; but that part of the story as it relates to the press is still pertinent.

The Bystanders

When Belfrage was arrested and jailed for the second time in 1955, I undertook a letter-writing campaign to several newspapers, among them the *Post* (where I had worked for six years) and the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. I was mindful of the dissenting opinion in the ASNE investigation of the Wechsler case. The *Times* published in the same issue my letter and an editorial deploring Belfrage's imprisonment without charge. It offered no comment on the issue of freedom of the press.

From Wechsler of the *New York Post* — the first McCarthy press victim — and from Wiggins of the *Washington Post* — the chief dissenter

of the ASNE committee — there was not even an acknowledgment of my letter and accompanying material. And, needless to say, there was no editorial comment in either paper.

Obviously there were exceptions to the seemingly all-inclusive “command of duty” to battle invasions of freedom of the press issued by the ASNE committee minority. The exceptions were those who fought not only against McCarthy’s *methods* but against his *basic premise* that there was an international Communist conspiracy which threatened the American way of life.

The counterpoint cases of Wechsler and Belfrage demonstrated that for the newspaper industry the First Amendment *was divisible*, even if their editorials declared it was not. It was an umbrella for those who went along with the Cold War policies of the government. But those who found these policies contrary to the Constitution had to walk in the rain. And if this heresy was compounded by alien status, there was exile.

And Some Rainmakers

In late June 1955 Belfrage was safely quarantined in the Federal Detention Prison in Manhattan (he left the United States in August), and Joe McCarthy had been declared a non-person after his brash attempt to take over the United States Army. One might have thought that the country could breathe a bit easier, with both the witch and his hunter at rest, but there were astute minds in Washington who knew that the nation could never relax as long as the international Communist conspiracy operated in our midst. Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi undertook the McCarthy mission. As chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security, he announced an investigation of subversive infiltration in the press.

There were men of little faith and less patriotism who believed that Eastland’s investigation was aimed not so much at uncovering agents of the Kremlin as to cast suspicion on newspapers that had the temerity to applaud the Supreme Court’s decision on school integration in 1954, and who worried that the Internal Security Act of 1950 (the McCarran Act) and the Walter-McCarran Act (which safeguarded our shores against menaces like Belfrage) were unconstitutional.

In any case, the hearings opened on 29 June 1955, and the first witness was Winston C. Burdett, a CBS correspondent whose pear-shaped tones resounded almost daily from St. Peter’s Square in Rome, and who had once worked for the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Burdett was led by committee

counsel Jay Sourwine through a tale (only third-rate Eric Ambler) as a self-confessed courier for the Soviet Union. But he was a first-rate witness in other respects. He named twenty-three persons who he said had been his mates in the Communist party cell at the *Eagle* in the late 1930s. Among those named was a man who at the time of Burdett's testimony was a financial copy reader at the *New York Times*, which had been a nagging critic of Eastland and Sourwine. Burdett had been best man for the copy reader at his wedding in 1937.

Two weeks after the Burdett testimony, the *Times* copy reader, along with fourteen other newspapermen (two more from the *Times*), were called to testify before the Eastland Committee. The copy reader's testimony was respectful but brief. He said that he had discussed his appearance with executives of the *Times* and had informed them that he would "avail himself" of the privilege of the Fifth Amendment if he were asked to testify about others.

As he left the witness chair before the noon break, he was handed a telegram from the *Times* telling him that he was fired. In the afternoon Eastland read a letter, dated the same day, from Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the *Times*, informing him of the firing, and including a copy of the letter from Sulzberger to the copy reader. The letter said that the copy reader's "course of conduct" had caused the *Times* to "lose confidence" in him, that his employment was terminated, and that the auditor had been requested to pay him any sums due him.

There were two other casualties of that hearing: a reporter for the *New York Daily News* and a former reporter for the *New York Daily Mirror*.

Having fired a man who took the Constitution seriously, the *Times* unblinkingly rose on its editorial page in defense of the right to dissent. The nation, it said, must at all costs avoid "a tightly controlled society in which every dissenter, every man who wishes to think for himself, is enchained in a futile attempt to insure conformity in the name of security."

Its contradictions on freedom of expression — internal and external — were not lost on Eastland. In November 1955 subpoenas went out to thirty-eight additional newspapermen for hearings in the third week of November. But Sourwine discovered that was Freedom of the Press Week, so the hearings were postponed. The list eventually was pared down to eighteen, fourteen of them present or former *Times* employees.

When process servers arrived at the *Times*, they were made comfortable in a conference room where the personnel department served staff

members up to them. *Times* executives were busy advising subpoenaed employees who had scruples about informing to tell all in private to the FBI. Then they could go before the Eastland committee, testify fully about themselves, but decline to talk about others on the ground that they had already reported to the FBI.

The *Times* a few months earlier had waited until the financial copy reader had testified before firing him. This time the axe fell more swiftly. Two staff members informed the management in November that they intended to invoke the Fifth Amendment, and were immediately suspended. Later, the two were offered the opportunity to resign. One did. The other refused and was fired.

When the hearings finally opened on 3 January 1956, once again I bore personal witness. My colleague John T. McManus, general manager of the *National Guardian*, and I were among the subpoenaed eighteen because we had once worked for the *Times*. Eastland's target was clearly the *Times*, and what better way to prove the *Times* a nefarious nest of subversion than to produce two live and functioning radical newspapermen who had formerly bored from within the palace on Forty-third Street? Eastland, of course, protested the committee was "not investigating any one newspaper," and the hearings were in no way designed to restrict freedom of the press, or to imply that Communists influenced editorial policy on newspapers where they may have been employed.

Only two of the *Times* employees called were cooperative. Three other editorial employees refused to answer many of the committee's questions and invoked the First Amendment, or no amendment directly. Two noneditorial employees invoked the Fifth Amendment. These last two retained their jobs, presumably on the ground that they were engaged in nonsensitive work. So did the three editorial employees who had not invoked the Fifth Amendment. (All three subsequently were cited, tried, and convicted of contempt of Congress. After years of litigation, the convictions were upset by higher courts on technicalities.)

On the last day of the hearing, the *Times* published a stern editorial entitled "The Voice of a Free Press." It said it would judge the subpoenaed staff members by the quality of their work "and by our confidence in their ability to perform their work satisfactorily." It was the *Times*'s own business, the editorial said, "to decide whom we shall employ and not employ. We do not propose to hand that function to the Eastland subcommittee."

The tone of the editorial was firm, but the policy was not what the *Times* had followed in firing the three editorial workers. Each of the three

had come to the *Times* from other jobs. Each was a competent professional. Yet the *Times* lost confidence in them because they refused to yield on informing and on holding fast to their constitutional rights. Thus, the great newspaper was proclaiming that it would not yield to pressure from Eastland on its employment practices while it was actually doing just what Eastland wanted.

In the second half of the same editorial, the *Times* informed Eastland that it would not be swayed in its policies by congressional pressure. "This newspaper," it said, "will continue to determine its own policies. . . . It will continue to enlist goodwill against prejudice and confidence against fear." Goodwill and confidence, however, were not in large supply in the American press, as revealed by the Eastland-*Times* situation. A survey conducted by Irving Dilliard, then editor of the editorial page of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, reported that of 190 newspapers in the nation's largest cities, 112 took no editorial position on the attack on the *Times*, 35 were critical of some phase of the investigation, 33 supported the investigation, and 10 took inconclusive positions. Dilliard asked: "Did Senator Eastland's boldness so impress the press that many editors found it desirable to avoid commenting?"

Each His Own Historian

The question is still relevant today, in the aftermath of the Spiro Agnew Specials. It was not possible, at this writing, to determine accurately the response to Agnew in the nation's editorial pages, but an authoritative source, Norman E. Isaacs, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors — he is editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and *Louisville Times* — delivered a pessimistic report at the end of November. Isaacs, who had insisted that the attacks were White House-inspired and were indeed intimidation, said that his forthrightness had buried him under an avalanche of "sick mail," including remarks about the "Jew-owned and Jew-dominated news media." (The Louisville papers happen to be owned by the thoroughly WASPish Bingham family.)

Significantly, half the mail from *editors*, Isaacs said, supported the Agnew position. He felt that Agnew's implied threat to the networks had already succeeded. After the next presidential address, he predicted, the local television affiliates "will cut the network commentary and analysis and will probably give their own discussion" of the president's speech. "The networks are in trouble," he said. "The White House people are chortling over how they have 'given it' to us."

More to the point is how the newspapers, magazines, and radio and television networks “took it.” One might have envisioned a closing of ranks, joint statements by the heads of the networks and the American Newspaper Publishers Association. Nothing like that happened. Each individual network, just like each newspaper, answered in its own fashion. The *Times* described Agnew’s attack on the press as an “exercise in folly.” The *Washington Post* published a chatty editorial under the heading “F.Y.I.” (For Your Information) in which it found the vice president’s speech in Birmingham “temperate and thought-provoking and in no way menacing on its face.” It described its own conglomerate (the *Post*, *Newsweek*, and station WTOP in Washington), which Agnew had singled out, as a group of autonomous republics, each speaking its own mind.

It may be that the understatement by the newspapers was deceptive, but the drama lacked spirit, and the script was platitudinous. An attempt was made by the latter-day Shakespeare to inject some life before the second act curtain, but his effort was theatre of the absurd—and not even good English. Shakespeare was worried about the prevalence of liberals in the networks and the “liberal orientation” of television news. “I suppose,” he told the television news directors, “that it would be shocking to take into account a man’s ideology when you hire him. . . . But if out of 50 or 100 men that you hire purely on the basis of ability you are going to end up with a tremendous number on one side of the ideological fence rather than the other, then you are going to end up in a box. How are you going to handle it?”

He answered his own question: Do what the newspapers do—for example, the *New York Post*, which carries Max Lerner and a “stable of liberal” writers, and William F Buckley, too. The *Post*, Shakespeare said, hired Buckley because he “represents the other point of view.”

Aside from the question of how one defines the word *liberal* today (to my mind Max Lerner does not fall even into that dubious category), the conservative point of view is overwhelmingly represented in the press and on the television networks. (Indeed, it is virtually the only point of view available in most of the local media west of the Hudson and south of the Potomac Rivers.) Further, on *basic* American foreign policy, there has been little quarrel between the liberals and the conservatives. Both are anti-Communist, both have supported the Cold War aims of four succeeding national administrations since the end of World War II. And if some liberals are now squeamish about *aspects* of American foreign policy (tactics would be a more accurate word), none, for example, has

advocated an immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. Not even in the face of Songmy.

For Shakespeare (and for the publishers and the heads of the networks) there is no acknowledgment that there is still another side deserving of a hearing in the public marketplace of opinion. What would happen if a radical commentator, skilled in the printed or the broadcast word, experienced in the industry, were to present himself for regular appearance in a newspaper or on a television program — as William F. Buckley is represented on both? He almost certainly would not be hired.

The debate, therefore, between government and the communications media is still limited. It does not countenance the *whole* spectrum of opinion, and in many areas it is further restricted by an identity of views between government and the owners of the means of communication. Limits are set by a definition of the “national interest,” which too often is identified with national policy. The debate is not yet significant or fundamental.

But it could become so. The 1970s are not the 1950s. The historical precedents I have cited — particularly the cases of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* — need not be repeated. The economic situation of the newspaper industry is good. *Forbes* magazine reported in its issue of 1 October 1969: “The fact is that, on the whole, the newspaper industry has never been healthier, not even in the heyday of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. Advertising revenues and circulation are increasing. Net income in recent years has represented a far greater return on revenues than those in other manufacturing industries.”

The *New York Times* has recently (in agreement with the unions) been enabled to increase the size of its daily newspaper from two sections of 96 pages to four sections of 112 pages. The *Washington Post* in December 1969 signed a contract with the Newspaper Guild providing for unprecedented \$300 weekly minimums for editorial employees.

Economic security may help to stiffen the backbones of newspapers in face of intimidation by government. But the quality and attitude of staff may prove even a more effective resource for fortitude. The *Times* and the *Post* are not quite the same newspapers they were in the 1950s, and the young newspapermen on their staffs are certainly of a different fiber than their counterparts of that decade. The victims of the congressional inquisitors (and the spineless publishers) of the 1950s were older newspapermen. Their colleagues, young and old, offered little support or protest.

Today, if a similar situation arose, it is doubtful that the intended

victims would stand in vulnerable isolation. It remains to be seen whether the publishers would attempt to fire a staff member for invoking any section of the Constitution. If they did, it is my conviction that in most cases the staffs would not permit them to get away with it.

In this column in the fall 1969 issue, I described the ferment among the staffs of the European press and indicated that the demand by editorial personnel for a greater voice in the policies of their newspapers would spread to the United States. It is happening more rapidly than I anticipated.

In New York, for example, during the October Moratorium, anti-war meetings were held outside the *Times* building (permission to use the auditorium was denied) by several hundred employees. At *Time* magazine, the auditorium was used and 500 staff members attended a rally. At *Newsweek*, 200 persons remained away from work on 15 October.

Since then, staff members at the *New York Post* have had several meetings with management seeking a greater voice in the conduct of the paper, and have won the right to hold conferences with top executives to discuss the paper's policies. At *Time* magazine, a group of lower-echelon writers have presented a set of demands to management. At the *Wall Street Journal*, an organization is forming to present similar demands. Outside New York there is a growing restlessness among working journalists, which will be reported in this space as facts are assembled.

These are among the most heartening developments in the American press in years and, to my mind, constitute the best possible counterthrust to the assault from the White House. We may even see the day, sooner than we think, when a column titled "A Radical Minds His Speech" will appear alongside William F. Buckley's acidities in several dozen American newspapers.

A TESTAMENT

by Robert Creeley

1

We resolve to think of ourselves,
insofar as one of us can so speak

of the other, as involved with
a necessary system, of age and its

factors. We will not be otherwise
than what we are. Our skin

growing more wrinkled, our hair
gray, will not be other than that.

We will laugh, smile, on provocation.
No hysterics shall obtain. We will

love perhaps in other modes but the
yearning, at least my own, will not

grow less, and as I sit now writing this,
a sense of time passing surely,

but with nothing of itself to say,
opaque as the night, dense, always there.

2

Not being dumb
I won't be nor you

either, I think. Not
resistance but no

less than everything,
a rage to keep

even in all respects.
The crickets' humming,

the longer intervals
of other insect

sounds, the birds,
tree toads — al-

ready the ear
has come to hear,

won't accept less.
Say that *I* is

the accumulation
of *my* virtues — breath

lasts, some simile
of water

slopping
to and fro.

3

When they
come to get me,
I'll

give them
you instead —
ashamed,

even trembling
in that fear
of love's

insistences.
But its generosity
will know

I don't go
easily
dragging you after.

Volume 30, Numbers 3/4 Fall/Winter 1970-71

Robert Creeley has published a number of books. He is distinguished professor at SUNY.

G.S. READING POESY AT PRINCETON

by Allen Ginsberg

Gold beard combed down like Chinese fire
gold hair braided at skull-nape —
gold turning silver soon — worn face young
forehead wrinkled, deep-boned smile,
tiny azure earring, turquoise finger stone, Paramita beads centered by
ivory skull-nut —
On Deer Mountain, in ship's iron belly, sat crosslegged on Princeton couch,
body voice rumbling bear sutra to younger selves — her long hair to rug,
dungareed legs lotus-postured;
or that half-indian boy his face so serious woe'd by tree suffering
more compassionate to bear, skunk, deer, coyote, hemlock, whale
than to his own new sprung cock. O Lizard Dharma
what doth breath, that Aums thru elm bough & rock canyon loud as thru
his mammal skull hummed,
hymn to bone-chaliced minds now multiplied over planet colleges
so many, with such hollow cheek gaze-eye tenderness, Fitzgerald himself'd
weep to see
celestial students faces, longhaired angelic Beings planet-doomed to see thru
too many human eyes — ?
What heavenly machine we sit in, Woody Woo's mad lounge carpeted
curtained fibred synthetic —
Voice waves from Gary's breast to gentle bellies hardened for generation —
Princeton in Eternity! Long years fall, December's woods in snow
Old poets half century ago their bones cracked up in death
alcohol trembling in immortal eyes, Fitzgerald & Kerouac weeping, on
earth once —
The voice moves thru time, old vows and prophecies remembered, mountain
prayers repeated,
earth voice echoing hollow under round electric lamps.

JOIE DE VIVRE

by Denise Levertov

All that once hurt
 (healed) goes on hurting
 in new ways. One same heart
 — not a transplant —
 cut down to the stump
 throbs, new, old.
 Bring paper and pencil
 out of the dimlit into
 the brightlit room, make sure
 all you say is true.
 “Antonio, Antonio,
 the old wound’s
 bleeding.” “Let it bleed.”
 The pulse of life-pain
 strong again, count it,
 fast but
 not fluttering.

FOR THE STUDENT STRIKERS

by Richard Wilbur

Go talk with those who are rumored to be unlike you,
And whom, it is said, you are so unlike.
Stand on the stoops of their houses and tell them why
You are out on strike.

It is not yet time for the rock, the bullet, the blunt
Slogan which fuddles the mind toward force;
Let the new sound in our streets be the patient sound
Of your discourse.

Doors will be shut in your faces, I do not doubt;
Yet here or there, it may be, there will start,
Much as the lights blink on in a block at evening,
Changes of heart.

They are your houses; the people are not unlike you.
Talk with them, then, and let it be done
Even for the gray wife of your nightmare sheriff
And the guardsman's son.

Volume 30, Numbers 3/4 Fall/Winter 1970-71

Richard Wilbur received the St. Louis Literary Award in 1989 and
was U.S. Poet Laureate in 1987.

The Fourth Decade

1971 – 1980



The Route

BY JOY WILLIAMS

Volume 32, Numbers 1/2 Spring/Summer 1972

Joy Williams has written a number of novels and short stories. She lives in Florida.

In tracing a path between the laboratory and his home a scientist automatically found himself choosing a certain sequence of streets and turns rather than its mirror image. The two paths were precisely the same in distance. There was nothing to choose between them in respect to the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the walk. But he had a strong preference for one over the other. As he allowed his thoughts to roam more freely than his steps, it became obvious that one route traced a letter which was the first letter in the name of the person who was the major source of pain in his life.

Ballston Spa, New York

We had the car so we went. We left as soon as possible for our marriage was not doing well. I am just a youngster and attractive. He is middle-aged.

I am hoping for the best from this trip. He is a chemist. We have many problems. He is working at present on a theory that shark size is dependent upon fin diameter and liver weight. Of course there are no sharks in Ballston Spa. That is one of the problems. We have never had a meeting of minds but we wed because we had good bodies.

Every day I used to wait for him to come home from the laboratory. I would make up big glasses of chocolate milk and pop-up waffles in the

morning and then he would go off and I would stay in our rented bungalow by the sulphur springs and watch the old fools totter up and down the hills with their jugs and jars and paper cups. I couldn't stand to even wash my hands in that water. It turned my earrings black. But everybody was crazy about it. It made rotten coffee. The whole town smelled like a bathroom. But they were mad for it. And then at 2:00 on the dot they'd all plug in their rock tumblers and scramble my television for the rest of the afternoon.

That was the point where I would go to The Office and buy myself a bottle of Jack Daniels giftly boxed. The liquor store was conveniently located. That was one thing about the place — nothing was anywhere if it wasn't right on top of you. I always bought my product boxed for then I could give the plastic insert of that Tennessee fellow to those various bands of children that roamed the streets of Ballston Spa. Those babies didn't have a thing, though I would bet if you went through that town today you would find them playing with those little plastic heads at least.

I would be drinking in the breakfast nook.

And just when I believed I couldn't stand it for another moment, the man who I married would rush up the walk, still in his smock, rubber-soled shoes, and safety goggles and we would make frantic love.

But the zing was out of it.

Actually I didn't know him very well. He had a long dun-blond head and an absent manner.

So we were both wanting something nice to occur to us again. And Herbie at the corner Humble who's the same age as me and doesn't have a tooth in his head kindly planned the trip and made suggestions and reservations. All we had to have was the destination.

When we went we didn't leave a thing behind.

East Windsor Hill, Connecticut

My first memory as a child was of a moth in my milk.

He can't recollect what his was. Nothing stands out. He had four brothers and one weird sister. Of the brood she was the only one I had the displeasure to meet, and she indirectly. We honeymooned at her cabin on Lake George. She was unmarried herself. I never even saw her photograph but I became acquainted with her washcloth full of pubic hairs — sort of hidden on a special little rod beneath the lip of the tub. Leave it to me to find it, of course. *Covered* with them as though she were going to make an afghan. Saving them like decent people would Green Stamps.

I remind him of this when I am annoyed with him. His sister. And he believes himself to be so sophisticated. What can he say? I have him there. We gobbled at each other all day. So far the trip has been dreadful. I tease his lap but he is unmoved. He dislikes attendants at toll booths. I think he would like to hurt them. He looks at them out of his heavy-lidded eyes. He has eyes like Jean-Paul Belmondo. There, I believe, similarity ends. The attendants smile at me. Their tongues protrude a little. I am really a knockout. I could have been in films but I lack the ambition. So this first day is not a good one. We are mumbled like bunnies in the cold. We stop at a tourist home. The owner is an ancient soul. I don't know whether a little old man or a little old lady. It wore Hush-Puppies and an overcoat.

Our room is warm, however, and very modern. All done in Colonial with eagles everywhere — even on the toilet tissue holder. I prepare myself and snuggle into bed, darling as a cupcake. For supper we had martinis and a soufflé but he is not happy. He sits and writes something out in a notebook. I think it is about me but when I look I realize that it concerns his goddamn sharks which he has never seen. I am an affectionate person. I nibble on his back for awhile. He has never showed the slightest desire to be different. When we first met I thought he knew a lot about love but now it's clear he knows only as much as I do.

Spotsylvania, Virginia

We stop for gas and the boy says, "Right over there is where Dr. Mudd was at." My husband refutes this. They glare at each other. I can't imagine what they're talking about. "He thinks we're tourists," my husband says. The boy doesn't put the gas cap back on. We remove some of our clothes because it is getting hot and we have some ice cream. The car is old and has old scratchy seats. Everywhere are trees and arsenals. He begins to talk about fishes. If I could get one starved shark, he says, just one, I could prove a lot. We are swerving along and I am having a cup of gin and tonic from our thermos. He talks and talks. I notice a clutch of freckles on his forearm that I have not seen before. They resemble a banana. A little later they bring to mind two parachutists. I am fascinated. I swear it's like going to the movies.

He is driving. This car takes a lot out of one. It is exhausting and seems to have intentions of its own. It is a Buick with big fins. I do not think about cars one way or the other but I have an opinion about this one. It has a strange odor about the right hubcap. Now I have heard that prank-

sters do this for a prank. They remove the hubcap and put dead fish or something awful there. Items that ladies use for their personal hygiene are popular. These same creeps will replace a perfectly good car engine with a broken-down one while you are in a restaurant or enjoying yourself somewhere. I have a suspicion that we might be victims, but I am not going to examine this further. We are traveling in a straight line but he is struggling with the wheel. His forearm bulges and sweats. He is so sorrowful. He sighs and tips the thermos to his mouth, getting the sliver of lime which is all that's left. He doesn't mind. He says chewing it keeps him awake. He is very polite and selfless. I used to be nuts for him.

That night at the La Crème de la Crème, which was clean but unexceptional, I am after him as always but he is sleeping and later when he wakes up, we take advantage of it, but he is so blue. He says, I have no dreams. I can hardly make him out in the darkness of this room but I say, Oh sweet potato, you dreamed up me. But he says Kehule dreamt about a snake swallowing its own tail which illumined for him the structure of the benzene ring.

He talks like this. How was I to know? I was only a baby when we met. My momma was still buying my brassieres.

Otto Loewe derived the whole neurohumoral concept from a dream, he says.

I am so disgusted.

Alert, North Carolina

This is the saddest day of my life. He was bitten by a bat. We were coming out of a restaurant after a very nice dinner and the little bugger staggered out from under a bush and fastened onto his sock. I beat it to a paste with my handbag but the act was done. I have never seen my husband under stress before. He is very calm. We went back to the motel and drank a little gin. I bought some crackers from a machine. He spoke about *N. brevisrostris* and *C. milberti*, looking occasionally at his ankle where nothing could be seen. Now I am not a cerebral person if you know what I mean. I was made for better things. For example, I simply cannot be topped. Now last night I was enraged. I said to myself that never again would I have anything to do with him. We were through! And I would leave him for good in Miami. For what is in Key West? I can't imagine. Key West is merely the end of the country is all. He can go down on the sea with a fish it's all the same to me was my attitude of the night before. But life is very funny. Now he is going to die. It's very

sexual. I kiss him, deeply traveling. The fillings of his teeth are like ice. There's a hint of chive and ketchup. He says, lightly, I thought, under the circumstances, I need the fluid from the brain of a suckling mouse. He knows everything and makes it all sound difficult. I am willing to go out and get it I say. He says, Or a duck embryo would do just as well. We have some more gin and he says that he's decided not to do anything about it. He goes out and around the pool of the Sun Tan Motel where we are and buys a bag of fried pork rinds from the machine. The pool has an algae problem. No one is in it. It's green as a Christmas tree. I am waiting on the bed and he comes back in all dressed up like the fellow on the Beef-eater's bottle. Flowered red jerkin, hammerhead shoes, and a white pointy beard. I laughed till I peed. I never knew he had this side to him.

Cash, South Carolina

There are many towns by the name of Cash. Actually, every town is somewhere else as well. Except, I have heard, for Edgartown, which is only in Massachusetts. This has never sounded right to me and perhaps it is not so. This is the only Cash I've seen though I imagine the others are the same. Birds nesting in neon lettering (for birds are mean and dumb everywhere). Movie houses taken over by Chinese restaurants. Mister Softees and rags in the streets. One has to make one's own joy. To travel through America you have to be in love. I am in love again! He is twice and a half my age but sound. He has become aggressive! We've stopped for the night at one in the afternoon. He embraces my yummy legs. I hold him tight but he's a different man from yesterday. He is confident and has a feathery touch.

I become a whimpering rag.

Nonetheless, opposite the motel is an electrical supply company which we can't help but notice. He says to me. Do you recollect Gerald Gee?

Of course, I say. How could I forget. He came to our house once from the laboratory where is he supposed to be an electronics genius. He broke a dish and didn't flush the toilet.

Gerald's had his breakdown, he says. It seems he found that mathematical thinking was touching off violent erotic excitement, often culminating in orgasm.

He says he can't understand how knowing this can help him. I agree. I say it would seem to me that few are fortunate enough to get such pleasure from their work.

Dusk returns to Cash. In the windows across the street are hundreds of different lights, all lit. They've been shining all day and at night they're still on. It must cost them a fortune. And for what? What's there to use them? Who's to know?

Out of simple and ubiquitous human experience, this generous and committed man discovered that his life was imaginary. The only element in the entire dream of it which was really clear, the rest being clouded in extrapolation, was this person, prone in a series of revolving bedchambers, with lust in her heart and the clear seamless mind of an infant. Though the evidence of her in no way guaranteed her reality, he decided that he would travel with and through his vision of her. No longer would he wait humbly for the wisdom that can only be won at the autopsy table.

Lugoff, South Carolina

As anyone could see from any map they chose to, we have not progressed very far! Lugoff can't be more than twenty miles further.

He's torn my blouse — pushed his hand right through that chemical crap they make everything of anymore. We turned off the highway and sped down a deep black piney road. There are turkeys flying beside us. He is showing most of his mouth in a great grin. The car is rocketing away with our electricity. He stops before an abandoned house. It is really an awful place. Half built or half torn down. Ratty Johnny-Kwik erected crooked in the front yard. No door and as we run in we can see the pink southern sky through the roof. He tells me to get on my stomach. I am so excited. The last time he suggested this, naturally I complied but then he didn't do anything. Or rather he was very quiet for a while and then he picked up a magazine. Then he became very engrossed in that. I went out for some Campari and a green pepper sandwich. I must admit I made the acquaintance of someone there.

This time I know it will not be the same. Fate has made a shambles of us.

My eye is on the knot-hole.

But then we realize that we are in someone's dining room and that they are having breakfast. Their backs are to us, thank goodness. A little

family eating from blue bowls. We leave immediately and no one's the wiser. The car's engine, as a matter of fact, is still running.

Atlanta, Georgia

His left arm is sunburned but his face is becoming pale. Last night I felt his ribs for the first time in many months. When he spoke to me, I found that I did not know what he was saying. This is not unusual, although now we fear that what was true before has become true now because he is rabid.

When he comes around again, we discover that he is talking about sharks. I am more understanding now. I have matured a lot. He is a little boy again with the soft wet lip of a little boy. He wants a milkshake. We buy milkshakes and pour a pint of Scotch into them. He says that even as a little boy he wanted to invent a shark repellent.

I can see this, I say. Make a good shark repellent and the world will beat a path to your door.

His experiments have been only partially successful. The sharks keep right on eating the protected food even while they're dying. Feeder and feedee are both out of luck. Such things have to be ironed out.

No he hasn't the time.

We kiss.

We are making it in a bank's parking lot. Santa Claus is walking back and forth. He's rather thin but it's him all right, holding a box of candy canes. There's a tiny person in front of him sucking on a pacifier and wearing a harness and a long leash as though he was a cocker spaniel. I find the situation . . . bittersweet. Two hippies come up, all arrayed in motley and dancing around, ringing bells. Fuck off, says Santa. The tiny starts to cry. Santa walks away. I am outraged. The hippies look astounded. They pick up one end of the leash. This is where we left them. I am shocked as though struck. Fuck off, said Santa Claus.

We also had bad meat in the bottom of a hotel here.

Valdosta, Georgia

Now this town was very sweet and cool with leaves and trees. We met the governor at a vegetable stand. He is not the governor of this state but of another one. He was buying peanuts and carrots. We are buying endive. Up the road I plan to make a salad and we'll drink Pouilly-Fuissé. It's very European. For example, we've decided to eat from a hamper. The

governor says, Well you sure look as though you had a good secret and I wish I had it too.

Well, we say.

Let me give you folks a little something I got right here, the governor says and he hands over a license plate which says ARRIVE ALIVE.

A gimmick, my husband says, a sop!

I agree. I look right into the governor's sunglasses. You're cow-old, I say. You're freezzzzing. I must admit I say this girlishly and coy.

Well, the governor says, shaking hands all around. It sure was pleasant meeting you for the first time. He has a beautiful Cadillac car. They leave.

He was certainly a well-put-together man wasn't he, I say. But I don't mean anything by it. I show my husband this by socketing my hip to his. We step back into our crummy Buick and a very judicious thing happens. All hell breaks loose. The car falls apart. I would not speak figuratively. I never do. It falls apart. Its time had come.

A worn battery cable shorted out on the frame, setting fire to the engine at the same time an electrode from the spark plug fell into the combustion chamber, disintegrating the piston. The tires went flat the transmission fluid exploded the gas tank collapsed an armature snapped shooting the generator pulley through the hood the brake shoes melted the windshield cracked and the glove compartment flew open spilling my panties into the street.

My husband is unflustered. A crowd gathers but there's not one dog. I used to have such a way with animals. Dogs don't come near me anymore. I say to him, I think I'm pregnant.

We walk across the street to a car dealer and on the spot he pays in full for the meanest machine I've ever seen.

Lakeland, Florida

We are at a stoplight, breakfasting hurriedly on gin and orange biscuits. There's a Court of Appeals in this town. Judges in robes are everywhere, eating barbecue, emerging from hardware stores and so forth. We couldn't care less. He wants only to get somewhere where we can lie down. His collars are too big for him. His cheeks have lovely malignant hollows.

Our car is snarling and burbling at the stoplight. It has air extractors, a shaker hood, six spoilers, four pipes, a 400-cubic-inch Ram Air V-8 and 4-barrel carbs. In black and plum.

Of course we're mad for it. I am dying to drive it but I can't push in the clutch. The governor is in the next lane. We destroy him, of course. We stomp the accelerator and five seconds later we are doing sixty. We dust him good.

But I know not forever.

We are in a cozy white cabin on a lake, swinging on a white porch swing. He is asleep but he is loving me up regardless. He is comatose almost always now but he performs beautifully I must say. We talk about sharks. He says he can't understand what he ever had against them. I say, They keep the ocean clean and I thank them for that.

He finds my remarks incisive.

We watch the lake and a fellow and a girl fishing from a little motorboat. They are having a wonderful time but are not catching any fish. Then a big speedboat with a star on it smashes right into them, scattering wood and cushions and hair and sandwiches all over, disrupting the scene to an extent which we would not have thought possible. The girl was a casserole. The fellow went mad. They'd been married only an hour and a half. The deputy sheriff, everyone said thankfully, was unhurt. It could have been a real tragedy. He charged them with having no lifejackets.

We leave immediately for they were innocents and we are as well. Now I have nothing against sheriffs for I am American to the core, but we were innocents, riding and drinking and loving our way to the sea.

Key West, Florida

We are here at Mile 0. I feel sick about it. He is almost gone. We eat lime pie and snapper. The restaurant isn't much. There was a popular restaurant here but it burned down in 1940. We do not look for lodging. I help him down to the beach. All the streets are dead ends naturally. People are selling sponges and shells and baskets made of opossums. A woman comes up and shouts in his ear, for he has lost most all his faculties. She points out west into the water and screams, Out there was where Dr. Mudd was at. He agrees. I feel that he has given up.

Key West is a pit of salt. And then there is the water. The governor is on the beach surrounded by constituents but his eyes are just on me. I see us reflected in his silver sunglasses. He asks an aide for a Dr. Pepper in a returnable bottle. He gets a Coke in a can.

He is not so hot.

We wade out — to where the green water becomes just blue. My man, and how can I say I have regrets? tends to me. He moves from desire to object.

So do I. We all do.

Oh! I say. Be mine. And he does. Right where the Gulf of Mexico looks like the Atlantic itself and all around us is seaweed in the shape of little hearts and the sharks are almost where you can see them — swimming and smiling at all the good things there are to do and eat.

That's the advantage of this. For they can't get here too soon.

We kiss.

Killing the Angel in the House: The Autonomy of Women Writers

BY ELAINE SHOWALTER

Volume 32, Number 3 Fall 1972

Elaine Showalter also had an essay in these pages in spring 1981. She has been involved in women's studies as teacher, lecturer, administrator, and editor. She teaches at Princeton.

"Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer."

— Virginia Woolf

In a paper called "Professions for Women," read to the Women's Service League in 1931, Virginia Woolf recalled two crises of her professional life: fighting off the spectre of Victorian respectability she ironically named the Angel in the House (after the self-sacrificing heroine of Coventry Patmore's popular verse-novel); and struggling to find the courage to "tell the truth about my own experiences as a body." In the first battle she thought she had won; the second, she thought no woman had ever won. The two battles are, of course, part of the same continuous war for artistic autonomy which women writers have fought since they first picked up the pen.

Woolf visualized the oppressive phantom as a graceful young woman, the spirit of Victorian womanhood, who hovered over her as she

wrote, and whispered, "Be sympathetic, be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure." Yet this exemplary female had always been a male ideal rather than a living woman. This jealous guardian, forbidding wrath or wit or independence, sounds very much, in fact, like an agent of Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf's father, who alternately encouraged her to write, and insisted on her adherence to strict standards of womanly conduct. With his death in 1904, she was freed both from the requirements of keeping his house and from the need to please him. She recognized that either of these demands would have destroyed her art; in her diary many years later she noted: "His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; — inconceivable. . . ." She felt that her imagination was liberated by his death, and also that she had managed to kill the Angel in the House.

Yet she knew that within her lay a rich hoard of feminine experience, locked and inaccessible; remembering herself as a young girl, she said in "Professions for Women":

... she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions, which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. . . . For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt that they realize or control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women.

As this statement suggests, Virginia Woolf consciously refrained from writing about her own sexuality. The absence of sex in her writings may be explained away, or defended, or even made a virtue, as a sign of her lofty standards of health, normalcy, and refinement; but her reticence is in fact a renunciation. In her novels, sexual passion becomes a masculine property, comprehended by women in moments of empathy rather than experience, as in *Mrs. Dalloway* when Clarissa kisses Sally Sewall and experiences with brief intensity what men feel. Like other male properties — power, hierarchy, aggression, and anger — passion, we feel, is one Virginia Woolf is happy to renounce.

Nagged by the shade of her father, and conscious of the power of male disapproval, Virginia Woolf developed a literary theory which had the effect of neutralizing her own conflict between the desire to present a woman's whole experience, and the fear of such revelation. It is a theory of the androgynous mind and spirit; a fusion of masculine and feminine elements, calm, stable, subtle, unimpeded by consciousness of sex or individuality. She meant it to be a luminous and fulfilling symbol, but

like most highly principled utopian projections, her vision of the serene androgynous imagination lacks zest and vigor. Whatever else one may say of androgyny, it represents an escape from the confrontation with femininity.

In her own novels, Woolf often presents the female sensibility as the polar opposite of the male — a duality which has much in common with D.H. Lawrence. The artist, embodied in Woolf herself, transcends the polarity represented by characters such as Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*; male reason, intellect, force, and sterility versus female emotion, lyricism, love, and fecundity. If Lily Briscoe, the painter who represents the author, rejects both of these extremes for the sake of her art, she nonetheless creates the strong impression that the art of the woman — motherhood exemplified by Mrs. Ramsay — is the truer dedication.

When Woolf looked at her sister-writers she readily perceived how their circumstances as women had made them weak; she was not as quick to see where they had been made strong. In the name of androgyny, she pities the excesses of women who worked closer to the core of female consciousness, and in particular she pities and regrets their rage. Writing of Charlotte Brontë in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf notes, "... we constantly feel an acidity which is the result of oppression, a burned suffering smoldering beneath her passion, a rancour which contracts these books, splendid as they are, with a spasm of pain."

If only Brontë could have transcended that anger, that bitter consciousness of oppression, Woolf thinks, she would have been a better writer. Yet it is precisely that bitter consciousness which informs Charlotte Brontë's books with the authority of experience. Although the stereotype of the woman writer is still diminutive, the reality of the feminine tradition in English and American literature is quite different. As Ellen Moers points out in an important article which appeared in *Harper's* in 1963, the authentic line from which women writers trace their descent is one of protest, innovation, and confrontation. As Moers says,

Writing self-consciously as a woman, the Victorian woman of genius thought relatively little of her special female sensibility, but a good deal of social fact: that women were an oppressed majority. "You may try, but you can never imagine," says a gifted woman in one of George Eliot's novels, "what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl." To be a woman of genius, brought up from earliest childhood with the sense of being a freak and a misfit, and with the experience of being inhibited and denied, provided a ready-made insight into something of how it felt to be a Yorkshire mill-hand, a ranting Methodist — or a Negro slave.

Women's anger can be rendered obliquely. Other aspects of female experience, however, are unthinkable, unspeakable, or unprintable. The Angel in the House commands that their existence should be avoided, denied, or suppressed. Woolf chose avoidance, and in her work, at least, she succeeded. Other women writers manifest more ambivalence; they struggle to keep in touch with "taboo" but significant psychic levels of feeling and energy, and simultaneously search for covert, risk-free ways to present these feelings. The conflicts can be extensive and creatively exhausting, draining off energies which could go into art.

The Mask of Madness

The battle to stay alive, to fight for one's emotional independence against the smothering embrace of the Angel, is fought repeatedly in women's literature. An early and neglected example, one of the most brilliant, is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper." Published in 1892, the story is the narrative of the mental breakdown of a young mother undergoing a "rest cure" (like the one Gilman herself endured at the hands of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell); and it is electric with the repressed anger of the woman who knows that she is being destroyed in the name of love and concern. As she tells her story — one of virtual imprisonment, enforced solitude, and inertia, prescribed by her doctor-husband — the reader gradually understands that she does not love her husband, nor appreciate his care. Rather, she is seething with frustration and resentment at his power to confine, control, and trivialize her. In her detested bedroom, she fancies she sees a woman in the pattern of the yellow wallpaper — a woman who shakes the walls with her efforts to escape, who circles the room endlessly on her hands and knees, looking for the way out, who is "all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through the pattern — it strangles so. . . ."

The woman, of course, is herself, trying to break out of her life; but she can do so only by being mad. In the story's terrifying conclusion, she locks herself in her room, systematically ripping the paper off the walls. In the role of madness, she can express her aggressions against her husband; and when at last he breaks into the room, and faints in shock at the sight of her, there is a triumph in her narrative. Yet she is truly mad; she has defeated him only by destroying herself.

It is rather disturbing to encounter in this story a description of the cure Virginia Woolf repeatedly underwent for neurasthenia (probably manic-depression): darkened rooms, rich food, bed rest, and no writing.

As Leonard Woolf describes it in *Beginning Again*, Virginia's illness came from activity and vanished with inertia:

If Virginia lived a quiet vegetative life, eating well, going to bed early, and not tiring herself mentally or physically, she remained perfectly well. But if she tired herself in any way, if she was subjected to any severe physical, mental, or emotional strain, symptoms at once appeared which in the ordinary person are negligible and transient, but with her were serious danger signals. The first symptoms were a peculiar "headache" low down at the back of the head, insomnia, and a tendency for the thoughts to race. If she went to bed and lay doing nothing in the darkened room, drinking large quantities of milk and eating well, the symptoms would slowly disappear and in a week or ten days she would be well again.

If she resisted at this stage, a crisis was sure to follow, and on four occasions led to a serious breakdown.

As in her own life extreme vivacity, activity, and excitement were the signals of mania presaging a depressive episode, so in her novels unchecked consciousness is always alarming. Women particularly do not indulge themselves in it. Yet, according to Professor Nancy Bazin, Woolf seems to have related the emotions of the manic state to the female mode of perception, and particularly to her mother. Androgyny represents a perilous balance between the female mania and the male depression; but Woolf recognized the more intense state as richly fertile: "... these curious intervals in life — I've had many — are the most fruitful artistically — one becomes fertilized — think of my madness at Hogarth — and all the little illnesses. ..."

Clarissa Dalloway exemplifies the self-restraint of many of Woolf's heroines. She, more than the others, has extinguished as much as possible all the excitement of her inner life: her male double, Septimus Smith, lives out the intense possibilities which Woolf saw as dangerous. His suicide is both an exorcism and a warning to Clarissa, who returns to the chaste and sanitary room where she sleeps alone on a narrow white cot and lulls herself with historical narratives. For Clarissa, for Charlotte Gilman's heroine, and for many of their sisters in literature, a room of one's own is a prison as well as a sanctuary. Psychologically enfeebled by their conditioning, they dare not defy society to do and say what they want; they struggle in a vague way to be let out of their rooms, but never understand that by this time the doors are locked from the inside.

The frequency with which one encounters madness in the heroines and in the lives of women writers seems to suggest that for them it is a form of genuine self-expression, sometimes the only one possible. As R.D. Laing's research into the genesis of schizophrenia has shown, mad-

ness may indeed be divinest sense, a way of maintaining the self in the face of baffling and contradictory reality. On the simplest level, madness offers a woman a socially acceptable excuse for expressing anger and hostility; and, conversely, the expression of these “unfeminine” feelings may be construed as signs of madness. Gilman’s heroine has to behave in accordance with the role of the madwoman before she can confront her husband. Madness hath its privileges, one of which is honesty.

The mask of madness appears with sad regularity in women’s books to the present day. In Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, for example, Esther Greenwood’s total rejection of the feminine role is acted out before the curtain of the asylum, a curtain behind which the author can slip when her audience appears too shocked. If crazy Esther Greenwood is disgusted by childbirth, bored by men, unimpressed by male nudity (“turkey neck and turkey gizzards”), Sylvia Plath can claim to be a normal mother and housewife, and describe the novel to her own mother as “a potboiler.” Mrs. Plath’s horrified commentary on the novel — “as this book stands by itself, it represents the basest ingratitude” — is a sample of the pressures faced by women writers, the double bind of the demands of personal loyalty and the urgency of artistic truth.

However comprehensible or brilliantly appropriate madness appears as a response to the woman artist’s existential dilemma, it is neither a dynamic nor a liberated response, but a ruse. And as ruses go, it is a very costly one. It would be cheaper to kill the Angel in the House.

“Actually, writing is an ideal profession for women. You don’t have to go to an office, you don’t have to be away with half your mind on your household . . . wondering if it rains, did you close the windows? And for the woman who is tied down to her home, writing is a wonderful emotional release, to say nothing of the extra income it can bring.”

— Faith Baldwin, ad for the Famous Writers School

If a woman is tied down to her home, one asks, what will be the emotions she needs to release in her writing? And what will she write about, besides these emotions and her fantasies of escape? The answer to the first question is that she will feel a large measure of anger, frustration, and resentment. The answer to the second is that she will have to write about what happens in that household, what she sees

through those windows. In *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov tells an anecdote of a monkey in the Jardin des Plantes given an easel and brushes; the creature's first painting showed the bars of its cage. It sometimes seems that women's experience is as restricted and as foolish; women internalize literary values as well as other kinds, and their own vision often strikes them as dull and small.

Women critics have agreed with men that women writers are often timid, conservative, and conventional. In her review of *The Second Sex*, Elizabeth Hardwick quotes approvingly de Beauvoir's strictures on artistic women: "Narcissism and feelings of inferiority are, according to Simone de Beauvoir, the demons of literary women. Women want to please, 'but the writer of originality, unless dead, is always shocking, scandalous; novelty disturbs and repels.'"

Women, it is argued, never go anywhere or do anything; they have less experience to write about than men. But with so little opportunity for experience, so little space in which to channel psychic energy, women, as the ad from the Famous Writers School so shrewdly recognizes, *need* writing as an escape-valve for their desperate need for self-expression.

The dilemma of the woman writer in the second half of the twentieth century — struggling against convention to tell her own truth, and faced with male critics' contempt for it, and female critics' suspicion of it — is dramatized in the case of Mary McCarthy and *The Group*. Published in 1963, *The Group* is a subversive novel about women's roles and marriage, a deliberate exposure of the fantasy of the educated American woman's freedom. As McCarthy described it, the novel is about the failure of the idea of "progress in the feminine sphere." Nothing — not education, not politics, not technology, not sex — can jolt these somnolent young women, these sleeping beauties, from their Vassar tower into dynamic growth. They are empty at the core, because they have never been free to experience themselves without the screen of male authority: cookbooks, sex books, child-rearing books merge in their minds with their Vassar lectures, as infallible guides to the conduct of life.

In 1963 this message — McCarthy even makes the happiest woman in the book a lesbian — was not one America wished to recognize. While the book became a best-seller because of its allegedly sexy passages (sex from the woman's point of view seemed especially titillating and risqué) and because women readers responded to its underlying anger and accuracy, the male intellectuals hastened to attack this "trivial lady-writer's book" (Norman Podhoretz). John W. Aldridge thunderously banished McCarthy from the intellectual kingdom in an essay entitled "Princess

among the Trolls." Now, he announced triumphantly, the masquerade was over. She was no great thinker; she gave herself airs; she felt superior to men; in fact, she hated men. *The Group*, according to Aldridge, was a kind of wish-fulfillment for her, enabling her to act out her self-deluding fantasies of intellectual dominance. "It is probably not surprising," he says wearily, "that Miss McCarthy's militant egotism should ultimately take the form of militant feminism and find its most satisfactory expression in the sexual contest between the brute male and the morally and intellectually superior female."

Norman Mailer, as one might guess, went wild. In a long essay called "The Case against McCarthy," he ranted against the detail of *The Group*, seeing in it what he calls the "profound materiality of women." In a classical Freudian analysis of his own metaphors and obsessions, Mailer describes this detail as the "cold lava of anality, which becomes the truest part of her group, her glop, her impacted mass." With sensitive critics like these, and best-sellerdom to boot, *The Group* virtually destroyed Mary McCarthy's literary and intellectual reputation. By the time Hollywood got hold of it, Pauline Kael reports in "The Making of *The Group*," McCarthy herself was regarded as "poison . . . she's competitive"; the book was interpreted as proof that higher education made women aggressive and neurotic.

Yet there is great irony in McCarthy's fall as a "militant feminist," for the chorus of women's voices in her fiction creates a veritable symphony of female self-hatred. McCarthy is merciless only with her own sex; it is to the women in her narratives that she directs her most relentless mockery. In her famous short story "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt," the Babbitty man on the train emerges with considerable dignity and integrity, despite his crude middle-class tastes; it is the autobiographical arty heroine who is stripped of all self-respect and pretension. Similarly, in *The Group*, the female characters internalize all their aggressions against men. John Aldridge managed to find Amazons triumphant, but in truth, Kay, Noreen, Priss, and the rest pour their anger and frustration into bitchiness with each other, self-doubt, self-sacrifice, depression, madness, and suicide. They do not confront their men, much less defeat them.

Pauline Kael was more perceptive when she said that McCarthy's satire was an effort to protect herself against the horrible image of the castrating woman by "betraying other women. And of course women who are good writers succeed in betrayal but fail to save themselves." Since *The Group*, we have heard no more about women from McCarthy.

Her subsequent books, a report from Vietnam, and a recent novel, *Birds of America*, narrated by an expatriate college boy obsessed with ecology, have found more favor.

It takes courage to hold out, for most women writers defying the stereotypes come in for much more abuse than McCarthy. The Brontës were called “outcasts from their sex”; Elizabeth Barrett Browning pronounced “coarse”; Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* banned as moral poison; Simone de Beauvoir denounced as frigid; Kate Millett proclaimed a pervert. In her remarkable long poem, “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law,” Adrienne Rich describes the choices women have — to write badly and be patronized or to write well and be attacked:

Time is male.
And in his cups drinks to the fair
bemused by gallantry, we hear
our mediocrities over-praised,
indolence read as abnegation,
slattern thought styled intuition,
every lapse forgiven, our crime
only to cast too bold a shadow
or to smash the mold straight off.

For that, solitary confinement,
tear gas, attrition shelling.
Few applicants for that honor.

Standing in the shadow of Virginia Woolf, women writers were encouraged to be androgynous, to transcend consciousness of their sex, certainly not to write about it. The highest praise a woman writer could expect was to be absolved from being a “woman writer.” As Erica Jong writes in “Bitter Pills for the Dark Ladies”:

The ultimate praise is always a question of nots:
viz. not like a woman
viz. “certainly not another ‘poetess’”
meaning
she got a cunt but she don’t talk funny
& he’s a nigger but he don’t smell funny
& the only good poetess is a dead.

In 1963 the spirit of rebellion and passion in women writers seemed so extinct that Ellen Moers sadly predicted “no reason to believe that English and American literary women, as a group or as a sex, will ever

again make the kind of gesture — and the splash — that they made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Yet 1962–63 saw the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Group*, *The Bell Jar*, and *The Golden Notebook*. And suddenly women were once again intent on exploring their own experience. Now a new generation of angry young women, great-granddaughters of the Brontës, is speaking in a language which will not go gentle. No more arts and wiles, no more fun and games. Today women writers are involved in a fierce encounter with the physical and sexual and social facts of their lives and, given women’s experience, the encounter is bound to be bloody.

Higgledy-piggledy
 Dorothy Richardson
 Wrote a huge book with her
 Delicate muse.
 Where (though I hate to seem
 Uncomplimentary)
 Nothing much happens and
 Nobody screws.
 — John Hollander, *Double Dactyls*

“Once the penis has been introduced into the poem, the poet lets herself down until she is sitting on the muse with her legs outside him. He need not make any motions at all.”

— Erica Jong, “Arse Poetica”

Today we are in a female Renaissance, a new Golden Age of women writers, an era of eros and anger. And if the new women writers defy male critics on paper and to their faces, they also create problems for their sisters. Used to the soothing myths of their sex’s greater “spirituality” and “purity,” many women find it profoundly disturbing to encounter expressions of female rage and eroticism, and particularly to find reflected in contemporary literature some of their own most deeply concealed doubts, beliefs, and feelings.

One form the new consciousness takes is role-reversal; the woman beats the man at his own game. Elizabeth Sargent’s blunt and lusty poem, “A Sailor at Midnight,” for example, reverses the roles of the hunter and the prey in a one-night stand. The woman picks up a sailor, and alarms him because their intercourse makes her bleed:

A sort of dread
 Struck him. "What are you anyway," he whispered.
 "Are you a virgin?"
 "No, I'm a poet," I said. "Fuck me again."

Women students of mine respond with mingled envy and suspicion to Sargent's directness. The woman's intellectual superiority, her sexual imperiousness, and her exuberant (or exhibitionistic?) obscenity are presented here with a self-confidence which contrasts forcefully with Mary McCarthy's lady on the train. Sargent's woman can really claim to be "myn owene womman, wel at ese"; and modern women find it hard to identify with self-possession.

Even more troubling than Sargent's poetry is Denise Levertov's "Hypocrite Women," which challenges the numbness women induce as an evasion of sexual and spiritual commitment, and the self-hatred which such denials engender:

Hypocrite women, how seldom we speak
 of our own doubts, while dubiously
 we mother man in his doubt!

And if at Mill Valley perched in the trees
 the sweet rain drifting through western air
 a white sweating bull of a poet told us

our cunts are ugly — why didn't we
 admit we have thought so too? (And
 what shame? They are not for the eye!)

No, they are dark and wrinkled and hairy,
 caves of the Moon. . . . And when a
 dark humming fills us, a

coldness towards life
 we are too much women to
 own to such unwomanliness.

Whorishly with the psychopomp
 we play and plead — and say
 nothing of this later. And our dreams,

With what frivolity we have pared them
 like toenails, clipped them like ends of
 split hair.

This is a subtler confrontation with the Angel, one that accepts a male view of female sexuality, and seems to use it to berate women. But Lever-

to use the familiar details of physical maintenance, the constant paring and pruning of women's daily existence, to suggest the excision of female sexual consciousness.

Physical sexuality is a central theme of much of women's writing at the present, and while it is not the whole of womanhood, it is vital; it must be faced. "The blood jet is poetry," Sylvia Plath wrote. For women it is not the blood of war and wounds, but of nature. And the taboos are still strong, surrounding menstruation, for example, "that terrible female vulgarity of blood," as Mary McCarthy calls it. Even strong men seem to fear it; Norman Mailer owns himself beaten by Germaine Greer's challenge to women on the menstrual mythos: "If you think you are emancipated, you might consider the idea of tasting your own menstrual blood — if it makes you sick, you've a long way to go, baby."

Earlier women writers, if they mentioned menstruation at all, emphasized its shamefulness; in Katherine Anne Porter's *Noon Wine*, the southern belles make themselves sick with home remedies designed to postpone menses before a ball, lest the young men suspect and be disgusted. In Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*, the trauma of menarche is clearly a part of Frankie's suffering; yet it is never mentioned. Recently, however, women are beginning to defy the taboos, to accept and describe the quality of this recurrent experience, its cultural ramifications, and its effect on women's self-image. In *Such Good Friends*, Lois Gould hilariously describes the modern female ritual of learning to use Tampax; while the heroine crouches in the bathroom, half afraid she has no vagina, her friends call out encouraging instructions. Menstruation also figures in women's pornographic writing, although it is conspicuously absent from male pornographers' fantasies; it does not stop Diane di Prima from joining an orgy with Kerouac and Ginsberg, which she relates in her *Memoirs of a Beatnik*.

Helpless Bodies; Free Wills

When they talk about their "experiences as bodies," the new women writers are anything but sentimental. As Alicia Ostriker writes in her long poem about pregnancy, "Once More Out of Darkness," which opposes an image of regeneration to the (male) images of our century as a wasteland, and of woman as a quagmire:

What I have said and
What I will say is female
Not feminine

Yes I said yes
 Not analytical not romantic
 But the book of practical facts.

The central experience of Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays* is the heroine's abortion. Reduced to quintessential femaleness, Maria experiences herself as nothing. In herself, without the sheltering identity of her director-husband, she does not exist except as a body. The abortionist's sadism ("‘Hear that scraping, Maria?’ the doctor said. ‘That should be the sound of music to you. . . don’t scream, Maria, there are people next door. . .’") is not much different from the shrill brutality of the actor who finds out, after he has mistreated her, that she is married to a powerful man: "‘Just hold on, cunt. . . *You never told me who you were.*’" Her life, its whole meaning, is literally in the careless hands of men; the abortion is only one event in her destruction.

Similarly, accounts of childbirth often emphasize the control and usurpation of female experience by men. The woman is most helpless when she should be most strong. In Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, childbirth is a clear symbol of the female condition; the woman becomes an object, deprived of will and stupefied, the utter opposite of the joyous creator, the poet. She is at the mercy of nature, science, and men, made passively to accept the narcotics that will further enslave her, since they make her forget the pain and thus condemn her to relive it. Esther has been taken to see a delivery by her medical-student beau, whom she perceives as threatening and even sinister in his omnivorous claims on her life. The prospective mother is a grotesque captive: "She seemed to have nothing but an enormous spider-fat stomach and two ugly little spindly legs propped in the high stirrups, and all the time the baby was being born she never stopped making this inhuman whooping noise." She has been drugged. Sylvia Plath rejects with horror the loss of consciousness and control, the manipulation of the woman's life by male expertise, the numbing of the woman's spirit to the pain which represents her only chance of free will:

I thought it sounded just like the sort of drug a man would invent. Here was a woman in terrible pain, obviously feeling every bit of it or she wouldn't groan like that, and she would go straight home and start another baby, because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been, when all the time, in some secret part of her, that long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again.

Even when the experience of childbirth is serene and dignified, as in Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall*, it has troubling aspects. Drabble's

heroine Jane is alone, in a cold house, tended by a midwife who has anxiously concentrated all the sources of heat in one room. Again the isolated room becomes a symbol of female experience. Still it is not childbirth, but a prosaic and particularly contemporary aspect of femaleness — a blood clot from birth-control pills — which finally brings Jane into possession of herself:

The price that modern woman must pay for love. In the past, in old novels, the price of love was death, a price which virtuous women paid in childbirth, and the wicked, like Nana, with the pox. Nowadays it is paid in thrombosis or neurosis: one can take one's pick . . . I am glad I cannot swallow pills with impunity. I prefer to suffer, I think.

There is a great deal of anger in some of these books. Virginia Woolf might not have approved of their rancor, nor of their insistent femaleness, but I think she would have envied their authors' freedom. Amazingly, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce lived identical life spans: 1882-1941. Yet how much he could think and say which she was forbidden! Today women writers are no longer willing to be silent about themselves, like Karl Shapiro's poets, "no belly and no bowels, only consonants and vowels." Good-bye to all that, writes Robin Morgan in a violent declaration of independence:

. . . we are rising, powerful in our unclean bodies; bright glowing mad in our inferior brains; wild hair flying, wild eyes staring, wild voices keening; undaunted by blood we who hemorrhage every twenty-eight days; laughing at our own beauty we who have lost our sense of humor; mourning for all each precious one of us might have been in this one living-time place had she not been born a woman. . . .

If few women feel this rage, even fewer can still pretend not to hear it expressed.

Beyond androgyny, women have a lot to say.

Common Sense as a Cultural System

BY CLIFFORD GEERTZ

Volume 33, Number 1 Spring 1975

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Very early on in that album of notional games and abrupt metaphors he called *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein compares language to a city:

Do not be troubled by the fact that [some reduced languages he has just invented for didactic purposes] consist only of imperatives. If you want to say that they are therefore incomplete, ask yourself whether our language is complete — whether it was before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were annexed to it, for these are, so to speak, the suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be seen as an old city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of modern sections with straight regular streets and uniform houses. [I have slightly altered the Anscombe translation.]

If we extend this image to culture, we can say that anthropologists have traditionally taken the old city for their province, wandering about its haphazard alleys trying to work up some rough sort of map of it, and have only lately begun to wonder how the suburbs, which seem to be crowding in more closely all the time, got built, what connection they have to the old city (did they grow out of it? has their creation changed it? will they finally swallow it up altogether?), and what life in such sym-

metrical places could possibly be like. The difference between the sorts of societies anthropologists have traditionally studied, traditional ones, and the sorts they normally inhabit, modern ones, has commonly been put in terms of primitivity. But it might rather be put in terms of the degree to which there has grown up around the ancient tangle of received practices, accepted beliefs, habitual judgments, and untaught emotions those squared off and straightened out systems of thought and action — physics, counterpoint, existentialism, Christianity, engineering, jurisprudence, Marxism — that are so prominent a feature of our own landscape that we can't imagine a world in which they, or something resembling them, do not exist.

We know, of course, that there is little chemistry and less calculus in Tikopia or Timbuctoo, and that bolshevism, vanishing-point perspective, doctrines of hypostatic union, and disquisitions on the mind-body problem are not exactly universally distributed phenomena. Yet we are reluctant, and anthropologists are especially reluctant, to draw from such facts the conclusion that science, ideology, art, religion, or philosophy, or at least the impulses they serve, are not the common property of all mankind.

And out of that reluctance has grown a whole tradition of argument designed to prove that "simpler" peoples do so have a sense for the divine, a dispassionate interest in knowledge, a feel for legal form, or a for-itself-alone appreciation of beauty, even if these things are not immured in the neat, compartmentalized realms of culture so familiar to us. Thus Durkheim found elementary forms of religious life among the Australian aborigines, Boas a spontaneous sense of design on the Northwest Coast, Lévi-Strauss a "concrete" science in the Amazon, Griaule a symbolic ontology in a West African tribe, and Gluckman an implicit *jus commune* in an East African one. Nothing in the suburbs that was not first in the old city.

Yet, though all this has had a certain success, in that hardly anyone now conceives of primitives, insofar as they use the term at all any more, as simple pragmatists groping for physical well-being through a fog of superstition, it hasn't stilled the essential question: wherein lies the difference — for even the most passionate defenders of the proposition that every people has its own sort of depth (and I am one of them), admit that there is a difference — between the worked-up shapes of studied, and the roughcast ones of colloquial, culture.

It is going to be part of my argument here that this whole discussion has been generally miscast, and that the issue is not whether there is an

elementary form of science to be found in the Trobriands or an elementary form of law among the Barotse, or whether totemism is “really” a religion or the cargo cult “really” an ideology (questions which seem to me to turn so completely on definitions as to reduce without residue to matters of intellectual policy and rhetorical taste); but to what degree aspects of culture are systematized at all in such places, the degree to which there are any suburbs. And in attacking that problem, an effort more promising than searching for essentialist definitions of art or science or religion or law and then trying to decide whether the Bushmen have any, I want to turn to a dimension of culture not usually conceived as forming an ordered realm in the way these more familiar districts of the soul do. I mean “common sense.”

There are a number of reasons why treating common sense as a relatively organized body of considered thought, rather than just what anyone clothed and in his right mind knows, should lead on to some useful conclusions; but perhaps the most important is that it is an inherent characteristic of common-sense thought precisely to deny this and to affirm that its tenets are immediate deliverances of experience, not deliberated reflections upon it. Knowing that rain wets and that one ought to come in out of it, or that fire burns and one ought not to play with it (to stick to our own culture for the moment) are conflated into comprising one large realm of the given and undeniable, a catalog of in-the-grain-of-nature realities so peremptory as to force themselves upon any mind sufficiently unclouded to receive them. Yet this is clearly not so. No one, or no one functioning very well, doubts that rain wets; but there may be some people around who question the proposition that one ought to come in out of it, holding that it is good for one’s character to brave the elements — hatlessness is next to godliness. And the attractions of playing with fire often, with some people usually, override the full recognition of the pain that will result. Religion rests its case on revelation, science on method, ideology on moral passion; but common sense rests its on the assertion that it is not a case at all, just life in a nutshell. The world is its authority.

The analysis of common sense, as opposed to the exercise of it, must then begin by redrawing this erased distinction between the mere matter-of-fact apprehension of reality — or whatever it is you want to call what we apprehend merely and matter-of-factly — and down-to-earth, colloquial wisdom, judgments or assessments of it. When we say someone shows common sense we mean to suggest more than that he is just using his eyes and ears, but is, as we say, keeping them open, using them judi-

ciously, intelligently, perceptively, reflectively, or trying to, and that he is capable of coping with everyday problems in an everyday way with some effectiveness. And when we say he lacks common sense we mean not that he is retarded, that he doesn't grasp the fact that rain wets or fire burns, but that he bungles the everyday problems life throws up for him: he leaves his house on a cloudy day without an umbrella; his life is a series of scorplings he should have had the wit not merely to avoid but not to have stirred the flames for in the first place. The opposite of someone who is able to apprehend the sheer actualities of experience is, as I have suggested, a defective; the opposite of someone who is able to come to sensible conclusions on the basis of them is a fool. And this last has less to do with intellect, narrowly defined, than we generally imagine. As Saul Bellow, thinking of certain sorts of government advisors and certain sorts of radical writers, has remarked, the world is full of high-IQ morons.

This analytical dissolution of the unspoken premise from which common sense draws its authority — that it presents reality neat — is not intended to undermine that authority, but to relocate it. If common sense is as much an interpretation of the immediacies of experience, a gloss on them, as are myth, painting, epistemology, or whatever, then it is, like them, historically constructed and, like them, subjected to historically defined standards of judgment. It can be questioned, disputed, affirmed, developed, formalized, contemplated, even taught, and it can vary dramatically from one people to the next. It is, in short, a cultural system, though not usually a very tightly integrated one, and it rests on the same basis that any other such system rests: the conviction by those whose possession it is of its value and validity. Here, as elsewhere, things are what you make of them.

The importance of all this for philosophy is, of course, that common sense, or some kindred conception, has become a central category, almost *the* central category, in a wide range of modern philosophical systems. It has always been an important category in such systems from the Platonic Socrates (where its function was to demonstrate its own inadequacy) forward. Both the Cartesian and Lockean traditions depended, in their different ways — indeed, their culturally different ways — upon doctrines about what was and what wasn't self-evident, if not exactly to the vernacular mind at least to the unencumbered one. But in this century the notion of (as it tends to be put) “untutored” common sense — what the plain man thinks when sheltered from the vain sophistications of schoolmen — has, with so much else disappearing into sci-

ence and poetry, grown into almost the thematic subject of philosophy. The focus on ordinary language in Wittgenstein, Austin, Ryle; the development of the so-called phenomenology of everyday life by Husserl, Schutz, Merleau-Ponty; the glorification of personal, in-the-midst-of-life decision in continental existentialism; the taking of garden-variety problem solving as the paradigm of reason in American pragmatism — all reflect this tendency to look towards the structure of down-to-earth, humdrum, *brave type* thought for clues to the deeper mysteries of existence. G.E. Moore, proving the reality of the external world by holding up one hand and saying here is a physical object and then holding up the other and saying here is another, is, doctrinal details aside, the epitomizing image of a very large part of recent philosophy in the West.

Yet though it has thus emerged as a focus of so much intense attention, common sense remains more an assumed phenomenon than an analyzed one. Husserl, and following him Schutz, have dealt with the conceptual foundations of “everyday” experience, how we construe the world we biographically inhabit, but without much recognition of the distinction between that and what Dr. Johnson was doing when he kicked the stone to confute Berkeley, or Sherlock Holmes was doing when he reflected on the silent dog in the night; and Ryle has at least remarked in passing that one does not “exhibit common sense or the lack of it in using a knife and fork. [One does] in dealing with a plausible beggar or a mechanical breakdown when [one has] not got the proper tools.” But generally, the notion of common sense has been rather common-sensical: what anyone with common sense knows.

Anthropology can be of use here in much the same way as it is generally: providing out-of-the-way cases, it sets nearby ones in an altered context. If we look at the views of people who draw conclusions different from our own by the mere living of their lives, learn different lessons in the school of hard knocks, we will rather quickly become aware that common sense is both a more problematical and a more profound affair than it seems from the perspective of a Parisian café or an Oxford Common Room. As one of the oldest suburbs of human culture — not very regular, not very uniform, but yet moving beyond the maze of little streets and squares towards some less casual shape — it displays in a particularly overt way the impulse upon which such developments are built: the desire to render the world distinct.

Consider, from this perspective rather than the one from which it is usually considered (the nature and function of magic), Evans-Pritchard's famous discussion of Azande witchcraft. He is, as he explicitly says but no one seems much to have noticed, concerned with common-sense thought — Zande common-sense thought — as the general background against which the notion of witchcraft is developed. It is the flouting of Zande notions of natural causation, what in the mere experience of the world leads to what, that suggests the operation of some other sort of causation — Evans-Pritchard calls it “mystical” — which in fact rather materialistic concept of witchcraft (it involves a blackish substance located in an individual's belly, and so on) sums up.

Take a Zande boy, he says, who has stubbed his foot on a tree stump and developed an infection. The boy says it's witchcraft. Nonsense, says Evans-Pritchard, out of his own common-sense tradition: you were merely bloody careless; you should have looked where you were going. I did look where I was going; you have to with so many stumps about, says the boy — *and if I hadn't been witched I would have seen it*. Furthermore, “all cuts do not take days to heal, but, on the contrary, close quickly, for that is the nature of cuts.” But this one festered, thus witchcraft must be involved.

Or take a Zande potter, a very skilled one, who, when now and again one of his pots cracks in the making, cries “witchcraft!” Nonsense! says Evans-Pritchard, who, like all good ethnographers, seems never to learn: of course sometimes pots crack in the making; it's the way of the world. But, says the potter, I chose the clay carefully, I took pains to remove all the pebbles and dirt, I built up the clay slowly and with care, and I abstained from sexual intercourse the night before. And *still* it broke. What else can it be but witchcraft? And yet another time, when he was ill — feeling unfit, as he puts it — Evans-Pritchard wondered aloud to some Zandes whether it may have been that he had eaten too many bananas, and they said, nonsense! bananas don't cause illness; it must have been witchcraft.

Thus, however “mystical” the content of Zande witchcraft beliefs may or may not be (and I have already suggested they seem so to me only in the sense that I do not myself hold them), they are actually employed by the Zande in a way anything but mysterious — as an elaboration and defense of the truth claims of colloquial reason. Behind all these reflec-

tions upon stubbed toes, botched pots, and sour stomachs lies a tissue of common-sense notions the Zande apparently regard as being true on their face: that minor cuts normally heal rapidly; that stones render baked clay liable to cracking; that abstention from sexual intercourse is prerequisite to success in pot making; that in walking about Zandeland it is unwise to daydream, for the place is full of stumps. And it is as part of this tissue of common-sense assumptions, not of some primitive metaphysics, that the concept of witchcraft takes on its meaning and has its force. For all the talk about its flying about in the night like a firefly, witchcraft doesn't celebrate an unseen order, it certifies a seen one.

It is when ordinary expectations fail to hold, when the Zande man-in-the-field is confronted with anomalies or contradictions, that the cry of witchcraft goes up. It is, in this respect at least, a kind of dummy variable in the system of common-sense thought. Rather than transcending that thought, it reinforces it by adding to it an all-purpose idea which acts to reassure the Zande that their fund of commonplaces is, momentary appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, dependable and adequate. Thus, if a man contracts leprosy it is attributed to witchcraft only if there is no incest in the family, for "everyone knows" that incest causes leprosy. Adultery, too, causes misfortune. A man may be killed in war or hunting as a result of his wife's infidelities. Before going to war or out to hunt, a man, as is only sensible, will often demand that his wife divulge the names of her lovers. If she says, truthfully, that she has none (I don't know what the Zande common-sense view concerning the veracity of women is, but if mere asking seems enough it must be unusual) and he dies anyway, then it must have been witchcraft — unless, of course, he has done something else obviously foolish. Similarly, ignorance, stupidity, or incompetence, culturally defined, are quite sufficient causes of failure in Zande eyes. If, in examining his cracked pot, the potter does in fact find a stone, he stops muttering about witchcraft and starts muttering about his own negligence — instead, that is, of merely assuming that witchcraft was responsible for the stone's being there. And when an inexperienced potter's pot cracks it is put down, as seems only reasonable, to his inexperience, not to some ontological kink in reality.

In this context, at least, the cry of witchcraft functions for the Azande as the cry of *Insha Allah* functions for some Muslims or crossing oneself functions for some Christians, less to lead into more troubling questions — religious, philosophical, scientific, moral — about how the world is put together and what life comes to, than to block such questions from view; to seal up the common-sense view of the world —

“everything is what it is and not another thing,” as Joseph Butler put it—against the doubts its inevitable insufficiencies inevitably stimulate.

“From generation to generation,” Evans-Pritchard writes, “Azande regulate their economic activities according to a transmitted body of knowledge, in their building and crafts no less than their agricultural and hunting pursuits. They have a sound working knowledge of nature in so far as it concerns their welfare. . . . It is true that their knowledge is empirical and incomplete and that it is not transmitted by any systematic teaching but is handed over from one generation to another slowly and casually during childhood and early manhood. Yet it suffices for their everyday tasks and seasonal pursuits.” It is this conviction of the plain man that he is on top of things, and not only economic things, that makes action possible for him at all, and which—here through invoking witchcraft to blunt failures, with us by appealing to a long tradition of cracker-barrel philosophizing to commemorate successes—must therefore be protected at all costs. It has, of course, often been remarked that the maintenance of religious faith is a problematic matter in any society; and, theories of the supposed spontaneity of primitives’ religious impulses aside, that is, I think, true. But it is at least as true, and very much less remarked, that maintaining faith in the reliability of the axioms and arguments of common sense is no less problematical. Dr. Johnson’s famous device for silencing common-sense doubts—“and that’s an end on the matter!”—is, when you get right down to it, not that much less desperate than Tertullian’s for halting religious doubts—“*credo quia impossibile*”—and “witchcraft!” is no worse than either of them. Men plug the dikes of their most needed beliefs with whatever mud they can find.

All this comes out rather more dramatically when, instead of confining oneself to a single culture looked at generally, one views several at once with respect to a single-problem focus. An excellent example of such an approach can be found in an article in the *American Anthropologist* of a few years back by Robert Edgerton on what is now called intersexuality, but is perhaps more commonly known as hermaphroditism.

Surely if there is one thing that everyone takes to be part of the way in which the world is arranged it is that human beings are divided without remainder into two biological sexes. Of course, it is recognized everywhere that some people—homosexuals, transvestites, and so on—may not behave in terms of the role expectations ascribed to them on the basis of their biological sex, and more recently some people in our society have gone so far as to suggest that roles thus differentiated should not be assigned at all. But whether one wants to shout “*vive la différence!*” or

“à bas la différence!”, the sheer existence of *la différence* is not subject to much discussion. The view of that legendary little girl — that people come in two kinds, plain and fancy — may have been lamentably unliberated; but that she noticed something anatomically real seems apparent enough.

Yet, as a matter of fact, she may not have inspected a large enough sample. Gender in human beings is not a purely dichotomous variable. It is not an evenly continuous one either, of course, or our love life would be even more complicated than it already is. But about 2 or 3 percent of human beings are markedly intersexual, a number of them to the point where both sorts of external genitalia appear, or where developed breasts occur in an individual with male genitalia, and so on. This raises certain problems for biological science, problems with respect to which a good deal of headway is right now being made. But it raises, also, certain problems for common sense, for the network of practical and moral concepts woven about those supposedly most rooted of root realities: maleness and femaleness. Intersexuality is more than an empirical surprise; it is a cultural challenge.

It is a challenge that is met in diverse ways. The Romans, Edgerton reports, regarded intersexed infants as supernaturally cursed and put them to death. The Greeks, as was their habit, took a more relaxed view and, though they regarded such persons as peculiar, put it all down as just one of those things — after all, Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite who became united in one body with a nymph, provided precedent enough — and let them live out their lives without undue stigma. Edgerton’s paper indeed pivots around a fascinating contrast among three quite variant responses to the phenomenon of intersexuality — that of the Americans, the Navaho, and the Pokot (the last a Kenyan tribe) — in terms of the common-sense views these people hold concerning human gender and its general place in nature. As he says, different people may react differently when confronted with individuals whose bodies are sexually anomalous, but they can hardly ignore them. If received ideas of “the normal and the natural” are to be kept intact, something must be said about these rather spectacular disaccordances with them.

Americans regard intersexuality with what can only be called horror. Individuals, Edgerton says, can be moved to nausea by the mere sight of intersexed genitalia or even by a discussion of the condition. “As a moral and legal enigma,” he continues, “it knows few peers. Can such a person marry? Is military service relevant? How is the sex on a birth certificate to be made out? Can it properly be changed? Is it psycho-

logically advisable, or even possible, for someone raised as a girl, suddenly to become a boy? . . . How can an intersexed person behave in school shower rooms, in public bathrooms, in dating activities?" Clearly, common sense is at the end of its tether.

The reaction is to encourage, usually with great passion and sometimes with rather more than that, the intersexual to adopt either a male or female role. Many intersexuals do thus "pass" for the whole of their lives as "normal" men or women, something that involves a good deal of careful artifice. Others either seek or are forced into surgery to "correct," cosmetically anyway, the condition and become "legitimate" males or females. Outside of freak shows, we permit only one solution to the dilemma of intersexuality, a solution the person with the condition is obliged to adopt to soothe the sensibilities of the rest of us. "All concerned," Edgerton writes, "from parents to physicians are enjoined to discover which of the two natural sexes the intersexed person most appropriately is and then to help the ambiguous, incongruous, and upsetting 'it' to become at least a partially acceptable 'him' or 'her.' In short, if the facts don't measure up to your expectations, change the facts, or, if that's not feasible, disguise them."

So much for savages. Turning to the Navaho, among whom W.W. Hill made a systematic study of hermaphroditism as early as 1935, the picture is quite different. For them, too, of course, intersexuality is abnormal, but rather than evoking horror and disgust it evokes wonder and awe. The intersexual is considered to have been divinely blessed and to convey that blessing to others. Intersexuals are not only respected, they are practically revered. "They know everything," one of Hill's informants says, "they can do the work of both a man and a woman. I think when all the [intersexuals] are gone, that it will be the end of the Navaho." "If there were no [intersexuals]," another informant said, "the country would change. They are responsible for all the wealth in the country. If there were no more left, the horses, sheep, and Navaho would all go. They are leaders, just like President Roosevelt." Yet another said, "An [intersexual] around the hogan will bring good luck and riches. It does a great deal for the country if you have an [intersexual] around." And so on.

Navaho common sense thus places the anomaly of intersexuality — for, as I say, it seems no less an anomaly to them than it does to us, because it *is* no less an anomaly — in a quite different light than does ours. Interpreting it to be not a horror but a blessing leads on to notions

that seem as peculiar to us as that adultery causes hunting accidents or incest leprosy, but that seem to the Navaho only what anyone with his head screwed on straight cannot help but think. For example, that rubbing the genitals of intersexed animals (which are also highly valued) on the tails of female sheep and goats and on the noses of male sheep and goats causes the flocks to prosper and more milk to be produced. Or that intersexed persons should be made the heads of their families and given complete control over all the family property, because then that too will grow. Change a few interpretations of a few curious facts and you change, here anyway, a whole cast of mind. Not size-up-and-solve, but marvel-and-respect.

Finally, the East African tribe, the Pokot, adopt yet a third view. Like the Americans, they do not regard intersexuals highly; but, like the Navaho, they are not at all revolted or horrified by them. They regard them, quite matter of factly, as simple errors. They are, in what is apparently a popular African image, like a botched pot. “God made a mistake,” they say, rather than, “the gods have produced a wondrous gift,” or, “we are faced with an unclassifiable monster.”

Pokot regard the intersexed person as useless — “it” can’t reproduce or extend the patriline as can a proper man nor can it bring in brideprice as can a proper woman. Nor can “it” indulge in what the Pokot say “is the most pleasant thing of all,” sex. Frequently intersexed children are killed, in the offhand way one discards an ill-made pot (so, too, are microcephalics, infants without appendages, and so on; so, too, grossly deformed animals), but often they are allowed, in an equally offhand way, to live. The lives they live are miserable enough, but they are not pariahs — merely neglected, lonely, treated with indifference as though they were mere objects, and ill-made ones at that. Economically they tend to be better off than the average Pokot because they have neither the ordinary kinship drains on their wealth nor the distractions of family life to hinder their accumulation of it. They have, in this apparently typical segmentary lineage and bridewealth sort of system, no place. Who needs them?

One of Edgerton’s cases admits to great unhappiness. “I only sleep, eat, and work. What else can I do? God made a mistake.” And another: “God made me this way. There was nothing I could do. All the others [are] able to live as Pokot. I [am] no real Pokot.” In a society where common sense stamps even a normally equipped childless man as a forlorn figure and a childless woman is said to be “not even a person,” an

intersexual's life is the ultimate image of futility. He is "useless" in a society that values the "useful," as, in its cattle-wives-and-children way, it conceives it, very highly.

In short, given the given, not everything else follows. Common sense is not what the mind cleared of cant spontaneously apprehends; it is what the mind filled with presuppositions — that sex is a disorganizing force, that sex is a regenerative gift, that sex is a practical pleasure — concludes. God may have made the intersexuals, but man has made the rest.

But there is more to it than this. What man has made is an authoritative story. Like Lear, the New Testament, or quantum mechanics, common sense consists in an account of things that claims to strike at their heart. Indeed, it is something of a natural rival to such more sophisticated stories when they are present, and when they are not to the phantasmagoric narratives of dream and myth. As a frame for thought, and a species of it, common sense is as totalizing as any other: no religion is more dogmatic, no science more ambitious, no philosophy more general. Its tonalities are different, and so are the arguments to which it appeals, but like them — and like art and like ideology — it pretends to reach past illusion to truth, to, as we say, things as they are. "Whenever a philosopher says something is 'really real,' " to quote again that great modern celebrant of common sense, G.E. Moore, "you can be really sure that what he says is 'really real' isn't real, really." When a Moore, a Dr. Johnson, a Zande potter, or a Pokot hermaphrodite say something is real, they damn well mean it.

And what is more, you damn well know it. It is precisely in its "tonalities" — the temper its observations convey, the turn of mind its conclusions reflect, that the differentiae of common sense are properly to be sought. The concept as such, as a fixed and labeled category, an explicitly bounded semantic domain, is, of course, not universal, but, like religion, art, and the rest, part of our own more or less common-sense way of distinguishing the genres of cultural expression. And, as we have seen, its actual content, as with religion, art, and the rest, varies too radically from one place and time to the next for there to be much hope of finding a defining constancy within it, an ur-story always told. It is only in isolating what might be called its stylistic features, the marks of atti-

tude that give it its peculiar stamp, that common sense (or indeed any of its sister genres) can be transculturally characterized. Like the voice of piety, the voice of sanity sounds pretty much the same whatever it says; what simple wisdom has everywhere in common is the maddening air of simple wisdom with which it is uttered.

Just how to formulate such stylistic features, marks of attitude, tonal shadings — whatever you want to call them — is something of a problem, because there is no ready vocabulary in which to do so. Short of simply inventing new terms which, as the point is to characterize the familiar not to describe the unknown, would be self-defeating here, one can only stretch old ones in the way a mathematician does when he says a proof is deep, a critic does when he says a painting is chaste, or a wine connoisseur does when he says a Bordeaux is assertive. The terms I want to use in this way with respect to common sense, each with a “-ness” added on to substantivise it, are: natural, practical, thin, immethodical, accessible. “Naturalness,” “practicalness,” “thinness,” “immethodicalness,” and “accessibleness” are the somewhat unstandard properties I want to attribute to common sense generally, as an everywhere-found cultural form.

The first of these quasi-qualities, naturalness, is perhaps the most fundamental. Common sense represents matters — that is, certain matters and not others — as being what they are in the simple nature of the case. An air of “of-courseness,” a sense of “it figures” is cast over things — again, some selected, underscored things. They are depicted as inherent in the situation, intrinsic aspects of reality, the way things go. This is true even with respect to an anomaly like intersexuality. What divides the American attitude from the other two is not that people with bisexual organs seem that much more peculiar to us, but that the peculiarity seems unnatural, a contradiction in the settled terms of existence. Navaho and Pokot take, in their different ways, the view that intersexuals are a product, if a somewhat unusual product, of the normal course of things — botched pots, gifted prodigies — where the Americans, to the degree their view is being properly portrayed, apparently regard femaleness and maleness as exhausting the natural categories in which persons can conceivably come: what falls between is a darkness, an offense against reason.

But naturalness as a characteristic of the sorts of stories about the real we call common sense can be more plainly seen in less sensational examples. Among the Australian Aborigines, to choose one more or less at random, a whole host of features of the physical landscape are consid-

ered as resulting from the activities of totemic ancestors — mostly kangaroos, emus, witchety grubs, and the like — performed in that time-out-of-time usually glossed in English as “the dreaming.” As Nancy Munn has pointed out, this transformation of ancestral persons into natural features is conceived to have occurred in at least three ways: by actual metamorphosis, the body of the ancestor changing into some material object; by imprinting, the ancestor leaving the impression of his body or of some tool he uses; and by what she calls externalization, the ancestor taking some object out of his body and discarding it. Thus, a rocky hill or even a stone may be seen as a crystalized ancestor (he did not die, the informants say, he ceased moving about and “became the country”); a waterhole, or even a whole campsite, may be seen as the impress left by the buttocks of an ancestor who in his wanderings sat down to rest there; and various other sorts of material objects — string crosses and oval boards — are considered to have been drawn by some primordial kangaroo or snake out of his belly and “left behind” as he moved on. The details of all this (and they are enormously complicated) aside, the external world as the Aborigines confront it is neither a blank reality nor some complicated sort of metaphysical object, but the natural outcome of transnatural events.

What this particular example, here so elliptically given, demonstrates is that the naturalness, which as a modal property characterizes common sense, does not rest, or at least does not necessarily rest, on what we would call philosophical naturalism — the view that there are no things in heaven and earth undreamt of by the temporal mind. Indeed, for the Aborigines, as for the Navaho, the naturalness of the everyday world is a direct expression, a resultant, of a realm of being to which a quite different complex of quasi qualities — “grandeur,” “seriousness,” “mystery,” “otherness” — is attributed. The fact that the natural phenomena of their physical world are the remains of actions of inviolable kangaroos or thaumaturgical snakes does not make those phenomena any less natural in aboriginal eyes. The fact that a particular creek was formed because Possum happened to drag his tail along the ground right there makes it no less a creek. It makes it, of course, something more, or at least something other, than a creek is to us; but water runs downhill in both of them.

The point is general. The development of modern science has had a profound effect — though perhaps not so profound as sometimes imagined — upon Western common-sense views. Whether, as I rather doubt, the plain man has become a genuine Copernican or not (to me, the sun

still rises and shines upon the earth), he has surely been brought round, and quite recently, to a version of the germ theory of disease. The merest television commercial demonstrates that. But, as the merest television commercial also demonstrates, it is as a bit of common sense, not as an articulated scientific theory, that he believes it. He may have moved beyond “feed a cold and starve a fever,” but only to “brush your teeth twice a day and see your dentist twice a year.” A similar argument could be made for art — there was no fog in London till Whistler painted it, and so on. The naturalness common-sense conceptions give to . . . well, whatever they give it to — drinking from fast-running creeks in preference to slow-running ones, staying out of crowds in the influenza season — may be dependent on other sorts of quite unordinary stories about the way things are. (Or, of course, may not: “Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward” depends for its persuasiveness on one’s merely having lived long enough to discover how terribly accurate it is.)

The second characteristic, “practicalness,” is perhaps more obvious to the naked eye than the others on my list, for what we most often mean when we say a man, an action, or a project displays a want of common sense is that they are impractical. The man is in for some rude awakenings, the action is conducing towards its own defeat, the project won’t float. But, simply because it seems so more readily apparent, it is also more susceptible to misconstruction. For it is not “practicalness” in the narrowly pragmatical sense of the useful, but in the broader, folk-philosophical sense of sagacity that is involved. To tell someone, “be sensible,” is less to tell him to cling to the utilitarian, as to tell him, as we say, to wise up: to be prudent, level headed, keep his eye on the ball, not buy any wooden nickels, stay away from slow horses and fast women, let the dead bury the dead.

There has been, in fact, something of a debate — part of the larger discussion concerning the cultural inventories of “simpler” peoples I mentioned earlier — as to whether “primitives” have any interest in matters of empirical fact that do not bear, and rather directly bear, on their immediate material interests. This is the view — that is, that they do not — to which Malinowski largely held and which Evans-Pritchard, in a passage I deliberately elided earlier, affirms concerning the Zande. “They have a sound working knowledge of nature insofar as it concerns their welfare. Beyond this point it has for them no scientific interest or sentimental appeal.” Against this, other anthropologists, of whom Lévi-Strauss is if not the first anyway the most emphatic, have argued that “primitives,” “savages,” or whatever have elaborated, and even system-

atized, bodies of empirical knowledge that have no very clear practical import for them. Some Philippine tribes distinguish over six hundred types of named plants, most of these plants being unused, unusable, and in fact but rarely encountered. American Indians of the northeastern United States and Canada have an elaborate taxonomy of reptiles they neither eat nor otherwise have very much traffic with. Some southwestern Indians — Pueblans — have names for every one of the types of coniferous tree in their region, most of which barely differ from one another and certainly in no way of material concern to the Indians. Southeast Asian Pygmies can distinguish the leaf-eating habits of more than fifteen species of bats. Against Evans-Pritchard's primitive utilitarian sort of view — know what it profits you to know and leave the rest to witchcraft — one has Lévi-Strauss's primitive intellectual one — know everything your mind provokes you to know and range it into categories. "It may be objected," he writes, "that science of this kind [i.e., botanical classification, herpetological observation, etc.] can scarcely be of much practical effect. The answer to this is that its main purpose is not a practical one. It meets intellectual requirements rather than or instead of satisfying [material] needs."

There is little doubt that the consensus in the field now supports the Lévi-Strauss sort of view rather than the Evans-Pritchard sort — "primitives" are interested in all kinds of things of use neither to their schemes nor to their stomachs. But that is hardly all there is to the matter. For they aren't classifying all those plants, distinguishing all those snakes, or sorting out all those bats out of some overwhelming cognitive passion rising out of innate structures at the bottom of the mind either. In an environment populated with conifers, or snakes, or leaf-eating bats it is practical to know a good deal about conifers, snakes, or leaf-eating bats, whether what one knows is in any strict sense materially useful, because it is of such knowledge that "practicalness" is there composed. Like its "naturalness," the "practicalness" of common sense is a quality it bestows upon things, not one that things bestow upon it. If, to us, studying a racing form seems a practical activity and chasing butterflies does not, that is not because the one is useful and the other is not; it is because the one is considered an effort, however feckless, to know what's what and the other, however charming, is not.

The third of the quasi qualities common sense attributes to reality, "thinness," is, like modesty in cheese, rather hard to formulate in more explicit terms. "Simpleness," or even "literalness," might serve as well or better, for what is involved is the tendency for common-sense views of

this matter or that to represent them as being precisely what they seem to be, neither more nor less. The Butler line I quoted earlier — “everything is what it is and not another thing” — expresses this quality perfectly. The world is what the wide-awake, uncomplicated man takes it to be. Sobriety, not subtlety, realism, not imagination, are the keys to wisdom; the really important facts of life lie scattered openly along its surface, not cunningly secreted in its depths. There is no need, indeed it is a fatal mistake to deny, as poets, intellectuals, priests, and other professional complicators of the world so often do, the obviousness of the obvious. Truth is as plain, as the Dutch proverb has it, as a pikestaff over water.

Again, like Moore’s over-subtle philosophers discoursing musefully on the real, anthropologists often spin notional complexities they then report as cultural facts through a failure to realize that much of what their informants are saying is, however strange it may sound to educated ears, meant literally. Some of the most crucial properties of the world are not regarded as concealed beneath a mask of deceptive appearances, things inferred from pale suggestions or riddled out of equivocal signs. They are conceived to be just there, where stones, hands, scoundrels, and erotic triangles are, invisible only to the clever. It takes a while (or, anyway, it took me a while) to absorb the fact that when the whole family of a Javanese boy tells me that the reason he has fallen out of a tree and broken his leg is that the spirit of his deceased grandfather pushed him out because some ritual duty towards the grandfather has been inadvertently overlooked, that, so far as they are concerned, is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the matter: it is precisely what they think has occurred, it is all that they think has occurred, and they are puzzled only at my puzzlement at their lack of puzzlement. And when, after listening to a long, complicated business from an old, illiterate, no-nonsense Javanese peasant woman — a classic type if ever there was one — about the role of “the snake of the day” in determining the wisdom of embarking on a journey, holding a feast, or contracting a marriage (the story was actually mostly loving accounts of the terrible things that happened — carriages overturning, tumors appearing, fortunes dissolving — when that role was ignored), I asked what this snake of the day looked like and was met with, “don’t be an idiot; you can’t see Tuesday, can you?” I began to realize that patentness, too, is in the eye of the beholder. “The world divides into facts” may have its defects as a philosophical slogan or a scientific creed; as an epitomization of the “thinness” — “simpleness,” “literalness” — that common sense stamps onto experience it is graphically exact.

As for “immethodicalness,” another not-too-well-named quality common-sense thought represents the world as possessing, it caters at once to the pleasures of inconsistency which are so very real to any but the most scholastical of men (“a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,” as Emerson said; “I contradict myself, so I contradict myself. I contain multitudes,” as Whitman did); and also to the equal pleasures, felt by any but the most obsessional of men, of the intractable diversity of experience (“The world is full of a number of things”; “life is one damn thing after another”; “if you think you understand the situation, that only proves you are misinformed”). Common-sense wisdom is shamelessly and unapologetically ad hoc. It comes in epigrams, proverbs, obiter dicta, jokes, anecdotes, *contes moraux* — a clatter of gnomic utterances — not in formal doctrines, axiomized theories, or architectonic dogmas. Silone says somewhere that southern Italian peasants pass their lives exchanging proverbs with one another like so many precious gifts. Elsewhere the forms may be polished witticisms à la Wilde, didactic verses à la Pope, or animal fables à la La Fontaine; among the classical Chinese they seem to have been embalmed quotations. But whatever they are it is not their interconsistency that recommends them, but indeed virtually the opposite: “Look before you leap,” but “he who hesitates is lost”; “a stitch in time saves nine,” but “seize the day.” It is, indeed, in the sententious saying — in one sense, the paradigmatic form of vernacular wisdom — that the immethodicalness of common sense comes out most vividly. In witness of which, consider the following bundle of Ba-Ila proverbs I excerpt from Paul Radin (who excerpted them in turn from Smith and Dale):

Get grown up and then you will know the things of the earth.
 Annoy your doctors and sicknesses will come laughing.
 The prodigal cow threw away her own tail.
 It is the prudent hyena that lives long.
 The god that speaks up gets the meat.
 You may cleanse yourself but it is not to say that you cease to be a slave.
 When a chief's wife steals she puts the blame on the slaves.
 Build rather with a witch than with a false-tongued person, for he destroys the community.
 Better help a fighting man than a hungry man, for he has no gratitude.

And so on. It is this sort of potpourri of disparate notions — again not necessarily or even usually expressed proverbially — that not only characterizes systems of common sense generally, but that in fact recommends them as capable of grasping the vast multifariousness of life in the

world. The Ba-Ila even have a proverb expressing this: “Wisdom comes out of an ant heap.”

The final quasi quality — final here, surely not so in actuality — “accessibleness,” more or less follows as a logical consequence once the others are acknowledged. Accessibleness is simply the assumption, in fact the insistence, that any person with faculties reasonably intact can grasp common-sense conclusions, and indeed, once they are unequivocally enough stated, will not only grasp but embrace them. Of course, some people — usually the old, sometimes the afflicted, occasionally the merely rotund — tend to be regarded as rather wiser in a “I’ve been through the mill” sort of way than others, while children, frequently enough women, and, depending upon the society, various sorts of under-classes are regarded as less wise, in a “they are emotional creatures” sort of way, than others. But, for all that, there are really no acknowledged specialists in common sense. Everyone thinks he’s an expert. Being common, common sense is open to all, the general property of at least, as we would put it, all solid citizens.

Indeed, its tone is even anti-expert, if not anti-intellectual: we reject, and so, as far as I can see, do other peoples, any explicit claim to special powers in this regard. There is no esoteric knowledge, no special technique or peculiar giftedness, and little or no specialized training — only what we rather redundantly call experience and rather mysteriously call maturity — involved. Common sense, to put it another way, represents the world as a familiar world, one everyone can, and should, recognize, and within which everyone stands, or should, on his own feet. To live in the suburbs called physics, or Islam, or law, or music, or socialism, one must meet certain particular requirements, and the houses are not all of the same imposingness. To live in the semi-suburb called common sense, where all the houses are *sans façon*, one need only be, as the old phrase has it, sound of mind and practical of conscience, however those worthy virtues be defined in the particular city of thought and language whose citizen he is.

As we began with an alley-and-avenue pictograph from Wittgenstein, it is only appropriate that we end with one, this one even more compressed: “In the actual use of expressions we take detours, we go by side roads. We see the straight highway before

us, but of course we cannot use it, because it is permanently closed."

If one wants to demonstrate, or even (which is all I have been able to do) to suggest, that common sense is a cultural system, that there is an ingenerate order to it capable of being empirically uncovered and conceptually formulated, one cannot do so by cataloguing its content, which is wildly heterogeneous, not only across societies but within them — antheap wisdom. One cannot do so, either, by sketching out some logical structure it always takes, for there is none. And one cannot do so by summing up the substantive conclusions it always draws, for there are, too, none of those. One has to proceed instead by the peculiar detour of evoking its generally recognized tone and temper, the untraveled side road that leads through constructing metaphorical predicates — near-notions like "thinness" — to remind people of what they already know. There is something (to change the image) of the purloined-letter effect in common sense; it lies so artlessly before our eyes it is almost impossible to see.

To us, science, art, ideology, law, religion, technology, mathematics, even nowadays ethics and epistemology, seem genuine enough genres of cultural expression to lead us to ask (and ask, and ask) to what degree other peoples possess them, and to the degree that they do possess them, what form they take, and given the form they take, what light has that to shed on our own versions of them. But this is still not true of common sense. Common sense seems to us what is left over when all these more articulated sorts of symbol systems have exhausted their tasks, what remains of reason when its more sophisticated achievements are all set aside. But if this is not so, if knowing chalk from cheese, a hawk from a handsaw, or your ass from your elbow ("earthiness" might well have been adduced as another quasi quality of common sense) is as positive an accomplishment, if perhaps not so lofty a one, as appreciating motets, following a logic proof, keeping the Covenant, or demolishing capitalism — as dependent as they are upon developed traditions of thought and sensibility — then the comparative investigation of "the ordinary ability to keep ourselves from being imposed upon by gross contradictions, palpable inconsistencies, and unmask'd impostures" (as a 1726 "Secret History of the University of Oxford" defined common sense) ought to be more deliberately cultivated.

Should this be done it should lead, for anthropology, to some new ways of looking at some old problems, most especially those concerning how culture is jointed and put together, and to a movement (one actually already well begun) away from functionalist accounts of the devices on

which societies rest towards interpretive ones of the kinds of lives societies support. But for philosophy, the effects may be even graver, for it should lead to the disarrangement of a half-examined concept lying very near its heart. What for anthropology, that most Fox-like of disciplines, would be but the most recent in a long series of shifts in attention, could be, for philosophy, that most Hedgehogish, a plenary jolt.

Doughnut

BY ANNIE DILLARD

Volume 34, Numbers 1/2 Fall/Winter 1975-76

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A young man felt hungry, so he popped into a bakery and asked for a doughnut. The girl at the counter was pale — like all bakery workers — young, pretty — was she putting herself through college? She handed him a doughnut in a square of waxed paper; he gave her a dime and stepped back into the street.

There was a worm on the doughnut. It was half an inch long, doughnut-colored, tapered at each end, and very fat. The young man knew it was not what biologists call a worm; it was not a roundworm, such as squirm in gardens and baitcans, nor was it a flatworm, such as rest in north-south alignment, electromagnetically, in laboratories. Probably the worm on the young man's doughnut was the larva of some sort of beetle, some weevil, billbug grub.

We are, as a people, indignant when we find a worm, larva, mouse, hairnet, or anything untoward on our doughnut. The young man had been raised (by loving, if ambitious parents) to expect that the ordinary standards of an advanced civilization would be ordinarily, and without fuss, met. So at first, as he stood on the busy sidewalk outside the bakery, looking at the doughnut and worm held to his mouth, he was — taken aback. He wanted to catch a lady by the elbow, a shopping lady in a “pillbox” hat who was passing by, and say, confidentially, joyfully, look! I almost ate a worm! He wanted to lead a dignified picket; he wanted to write the president.

Now the young man, whose name was, by chance, Napoleon, was very religious. He wore his fringed scarf like a tallis; the coins in his pockets jingled, winding up prayers; he could walk all day without resting; he could catch a fish with his hands; he cleaned his glasses frequently with a corner of his handkerchief, peering about him as he wiped, praising God. He was at home here in the world: the tonus of his muscles, curving his fingers, closing his jaw, holding his limbs to his thorax, signified an easy flexibility, an unselfconscious vigor. Napoleon stepped back into the warm bakery, holding his doughnut tenderly by the waxed paper.

The worm was well centered and still on an arc of the doughnut, so he looked around. A man in red earmuffs was buying a loaf of salt-risen bread; maybe he came in every day on his lunch hour; maybe he kept the bakery alive. Or, more likely, the bakery was going broke and the owner, father of the pale co-ed, ran it at a loss to keep faith, to give his earmuffed neighbor his daily bread. The daughter came and went through the windowed door behind the counter, to the back room, the bakery proper, where the rest of the family presumably labored, dusty to the wrists, the chins, with wormy, salt-rising flour.

"Excuse me," the young man whispered to the girl behind the counter, "there's a worm on my doughnut." Her rounded arms were practically hairless; she crossed them over the bodice of her uniform which shone palely white in the diffuse winter light.

"What? Well it didn't come from here — " Her voice was high and strong; her teeth, long and lovely. At once the circular window on the door to the back framed a little set of eyes and a gray, fat-curved wig; the door pushed open, and a woman stood at the counter. There was not a trace of flour on her, but the undersides of her fingernails were dead white.

"He says he thinks he has a worm on his doughnut."

"I'm certain of it," the young man said, "positive!" And he showed them the worm glistening nakedly on the scales of sugar glaze.

"What do you want to bring a worm in a bakery for?" The older woman shivered when the door opened.

"I bought it here," he said apologetically, appealing to the girl.

"If you paid for it, it's your business — "

He left again, of course. It smelled good in there; he was hungry. Oh she was a pretty person in the world, the pale baker's daughter. Her sparse brown eyebrows arched high above her eyes, giving her an alert,

even astonished, look. He sat on a bench in front of the bank where the bus stopped.

He was planning to carry his doughnut, and his newly purchased pet, in a casual, negligent manner — the manner of an ordinary fellow who is thoughtlessly holding an ordinary doughnut — so no woman would notice the worm and be frightened; but the worm acted queer. When he held it upside down it didn't right itself. He studied the worm; it was shaped like a little, segmented eye. The pinker, nose end was its head. He poked its side and it quivered, then lay still.

"Hey," he said, for no one could hear, "hey, are you okay?" Such an American expression of tenderness! What do people in other countries do? The phrase is suited to many occasions. In the course of a long lifetime, a religious young man like Napoleon might say it, not only to an inert worm on a doughnut, but to a waitress in a restaurant whom he noticed crying as she took his order; to a jay who bumped his head on the windowpane; even to an orchardist who suddenly sawed off his finger pruning the pears and was looking at his hand in surprise. It is not an appropriate question for the dying; its answer is "yes" — "yes, in spite of this thing, which you so thoughtfully noticed, I see now that I am indeed, for further travels, reasonably fit, able, okay."

Diviner, lover, look to your worm. Of course, Napoleon reasoned, this worm is sluggish because he has probably been recently baked. And in fact, spurred by another lateral prod, the worm began to pull himself, inchworm-fashion, around the doughnut's top surface, as around a tiny track. What, Napoleon asked himself, do these things eat — doughnuts? I could keep him in doughnuts, but he isn't eating this one. Maybe he wants to pupate; should I bury him in a flour canister? These things multiply — six thousand a year. He couldn't raise it, not out of charity to himself. There was no place it might fend for itself except the bakery, and sneaking it back in the bakery might shortly ruin the baker.

Purely ethical questions did not interest or concern the young man, but he understood that he would have to kill the worm by neglect or violence. So he broke the doughnut and ate the pieces, and the worm, heedlessly, unmindfully. On the street a traffic cop did an intricate, arm-waving dance to the percussion of his one-note whistle; a variegated pigeon, hovering for an instant, descended to a stone gargoyle on the ledge above the bank's door; a few small snowflakes blew down to the walk and melted; a merchant of some sort on an errand, for he was not wearing a coat, hurried by singing an old song which begins:

Wine at the wedding
(And her mother weeping)
We all kissed the bride
Before she jumped in bed!

The young man was thirsty, so he went to the drugstore and ordered a Coke. Beside him at the counter a schoolgirl was pulling up her wool socks; on the other side, one of the pharmacists, the pocket of his white tunic full of ball-point pens, studied the menu as if he'd never seen it before. Maybe he was new. The waitress, an old mulatto covered with moles, brought Napoleon his Coke and he held out a quarter.

"Honey," she said, wiping the counter, "if you want to give me a quarter that's all right, but you're supposed to pay the cashier." On the way home in the bus, he wrapped his scarf around his neck for warmth and sat curled in his seat by the window. It was already dark; bells of colored lights strung over the intersections rang in the wind.

Short Papa

BY JAMES PURDY

Volume 34, Number 4 Summer 1976

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When I caught a glimpse of Short Papa coming through the back yard that cold sleety February afternoon I had straight away a funny feeling it might be the last time he would visit me. He looked about the same, tall and lean and wind-burned, but despite the way he kept his shoulders back and his head up he spoke and shook hands like a man who didn't expect you to believe a word he said.

Neither Mama nor Sister Ruth budged an inch when I told them who was out on the back porch, but after a struggle with herself, Ma finally said, "You can give Short Papa this plate of hot Brunswick stew, and let him get his strength back from wherever he has been this time. And then you tell him, Lester, he has got to light out again soon as possible."

"But, Ma," I began, "can't he stay just the night?"

"Father or not father," she began, "after what that man has done to us, no . . . I'll feed him but I won't take him in, and you give him my message, hear? Eat and get!"

But I seen that my remark about how after all it was my own dad who had come to see me had moved Ma more than a little, for her breast rose and fell like it always does when she is wrought up.

"He'll only get in more trouble if he stays, Lester, and he'll get you in trouble too. I do regret to talk against your papa, but he is a no-account, low-down —"

She stopped, though, when she saw the expression on my face.

Short Papa sat, hands folded, on a little green wicker upright chair before the round green wicker table as I brought him his hot plate of Brunswick stew to the back porch.

“Thank you, Les.” He eyed the plate and then took it from me. I can still see the way he ate the fricassee chicken and little bits of lima beans and potatoes. He was most famished.

“You can assure your Ma I’ll be on my way right after sunset,” he replied to the message I bore from her. “Tell her I don’t want folks to see me in town... by daylight.”

I nodded, looking at his empty plate.

“Your Ma has taken awful good care of you, Les. I observed that right away. I’m grateful to her for that, you can tell her. The day I get back on my feet, son, I will see to it that a lot of the things owin’ to you will be yours. . . . Count on me.”

I didn’t quite know what he meant then, but I was pleased he felt I deserved something. Ma didn’t often make me feel deserving.

Short Papa got up from the table, loosened his suspenders under his suit coat, felt in his breast pocket as he kept clearing his throat, and then sat down again as he said, “Matter of fact, Les, I have brought you a little something. But first you best take this plate back to the kitchen, for you know how fussy your Ma is about dirty dishes standing around.”

I rushed with the plate back to the kitchen and on the double back to Short Papa, and sat down beside him on a little taboret which we use for sitting on.

“I want you to promise me, though, you won’t lose it after I give it to you,” Short Papa said solemnly.

I promised.

“Cross your heart and all that.” Short Papa sort of grinned, but I knew he was dead serious and wanted me to be.

“Cross my heart, Papa.”

“All right, Lester. Then here it is.”

He handed me a great, really heavy gold watch with a massive chain a-hanging from it.

“Don’t you worry now, Les. It is not stolen. It is your great-grandpa’s watch. All during my most recent trouble I kept it in a safety deposit vault over at Moortown. I got behind on the annual rent payments when I was in jail, but the bank trusted me, Les, and they kept it. I have paid up for the arrears and this watch is yours. It has been in the family for well over a hundred years, you can count on that.”

I was not really glad to get the watch, and yet I wanted it too. I wanted also to show Short Papa I was grateful, and so I hugged and kissed him. His eyes watered a little and he turned away from me, and then he laughed and slapped my shoulder several times.

"Keep it in a safe place, Les, for beyond what it's worth, which ain't inconsiderable, it's your old pa and his pa, and his pa before him that owned it. Understand? 'Course you do —"

After Short Papa left, I sat for a long time on the back porch listening to my watch tick. It had a powerful beat to it. From behind me I could hear Ma talking with Sister Ruth about the dress they were making for her wedding. Ruth was going to be married in June.

I considered how Short Papa's sudden arrival and departure had made no impression on them. He might as well have been the man who comes to collect the old papers and tin cans. Yet he was Ruth's father too.

"You take my word for it, Les, things are going to be hunky-dory one day for all of us again."

That was what Pa had said to me as he slipped out the back way in the gathering darkness, and like the ticking of my watch those words kept pounding in my ears.

Ma had made me ashamed of Papa, always reminding me of the many times he had been sent to jail for a short stretch (hence his nickname), and once out, he would only be sent back again, and so on and so forth, but there was now something about the way this watch ticking away in my possession made me feel not only different about Papa and his pa and his pa before him, I felt for the first time I was connected with somebody, or with something. I felt I had a basis, you see. But I didn't want anybody to know I had the watch, and I also felt that I would never see Short Papa again, that he had come back, so to speak his piece and be gone for good.

As a result I felt awful crushed that Short Papa had been entertained so miserly by Ma, being fed on the back porch like a tramp, and then dismissed. But then Ma's attitude towards Pa was hard to fathom, for though she never wanted any more to do with him she never said anything about getting a divorce. She just didn't want any more men around, for one thing, and then, as she said, why go to the bother of divorcing somebody when you was already divorced from him for good and all. . . .

I kept the watch under my pillow at night, and I wound it cautiously and slow twice a day, like he had instructed me, and I never let it out of my sight whilst I was awake, keeping it with me at all times. I could not imagine being without it ever now.

After a couple to three months of this great care with his watch, and to tell the truth getting a little weary sometimes with the worry and guardianship bestowed on it, the polishing and keeping it when unused in its own little cotton case, and also seeing it was hid from Ma, for I feared she might claim it away from me for what Pa owed her, I remember the time it happened: It was an unsteady spring afternoon, when it couldn't make up its mind whether it was still winter or shirt-sleeves weather, and I had gone to the Regal Pool Parlors to watch the fellows shoot pool, for at this time their hard-fast rule there was that nobody under sixteen was allowed to play, but you could be a spectator provided you kept your mouth shut.

Absorbed in the games and the talk of the older fellows, before I was aware of it all the shadows had lengthened outside and the first street lights had begun to pop on, and so then almost automatically I began to lift the chain to my watch, and as I did so I was all at once reminded of another time further back when Short Papa had been teaching me to fish and he had said nervously: "Pull up your rod, Les, you've got a bite there!" And I had pulled of course and felt the rod heavy at first and weighted but then pulling harder I got this terrible lightness, and yanking the pole to shore there was nothing on the hook at all, including no bait neither. And pulling now on the watch chain I drew up nothing from my pocket. My watch was gone. I got faint-sick all over. I was too shaky in fact to get up and start looking. I was pretty sure, nonplussed though I was, that I had not lost it here in the Regal Pool Parlors, but I went over to Bud Hughes the manager, who knew me and my family, and told him.

Bud studied my face a long time, and then finally I saw he believed me, but he kept asking a few more questions, like where I had got the watch in the first place, and when. I lied to him then because if he had known it come direct from Short Papa he would have thought it was stolen. So I told him the far side of the truth, that it was from my great-grandfather, passed on to me, and this seemed to satisfy him, and he said he would be on the lookout.

Almost every day thereafter on the way home from school I stopped in at the Regal to see if they had any news about my watch, and it got to be a kind of joke there with the customers and with Bud especially. I think they were almost half-glad to see me show up so regular, and inquire.

"No news, though, yet about your great-grandfather's watch," Bud Hughes would generally manage to quip at some time during my visit, and he would wink at me.

Then the joke about the missing watch having run its course, no mention was finally ever made of it again, and then after a while I quit going to the Regal entirely.

I held on to the chain, though, like for dear life, and never left it out of my grasp if I could help it.

During this period of what must have been a year or two, Ma would often study me more carefully than usual as if she had decided there was something wrong somewhere, but then finally decided she didn't want to know maybe what it was, for she had enough other worries nagging away at her.

About this time, school being out, and the long summer vacation getting under way, I got me a job in a concession at Auglaize Amusement Park selling Crackerjack and candy bars in the arcade that faces the river. They give me a nice white uniform and cap, and for the first time the girls began making eyes at me. . . . I realized that summer I was growing up, and I also realized I would soon be able to leave Ma for good and fend for myself.

On the way to work I would pass this fortune teller's booth early each P.M. and the lady who told the fortunes was usually seated in a silk upholstered armchair outside, and got to know me by sight. She wasn't exactly young or old, and went under the name Madame Amelia. She was also very pleasant to me partly because she knowed I worked in the concession. One time right out of the blue she told me she would be happy to give a nice young boy starting out a free reading but not to wait too long to come in and take advantage of it, now business was still a bit slack.

I had sort of a crush on a young girl who come in now with her soldier boyfriend and bought popcorn from me, and I wanted like everything to find out her name and if she was going to be married to her boyfriend. So I decided finally to take advantage of Madame Amelia's invitation and offer. . . . The fortune telling booth with the smell of incense and jingle of little wind chimes and the perfume of red jasmine which she wore on her own person, the thought of the girl I loved and her soldier friend sort of went right out of my head and vanished into thin air.

I felt an old hurt begin to throb inside me.

Madame Amelia at first sort of flailed around asking me a few leading questions, such as where I had grown up, if I was the only boy in the family and if I had worked in the concession before, and so on — all just to get her warmed up, as I later found out was the practice with "readers." But then just before she began the actual fortune in earnest, she held her breast, her eyes closed tight, and she looked so tortured and

distressed I thought she was about to have a heart attack, but it was all part also of her getting in touch with the “hidden forces” which was to direct her sorting out your fortune.

Then she got very calm and quiet, and looked me straight in the eye. I stirred under her searching scowl.

“Before I begin, Lester,” she said, shading her brow, “I must ask you something, for you are a good subject, my dear — I can tell — and unusually receptive for a young boy. What I would get for you, therefore, would come from deeper down than just any ordinary fortune. Is that clear?”

She looked at me very narrowly. “In other words, Lester, do you want to hear the truth or do you just want the usual amusement park rigmarole?”

“The truth, Madame Amelia,” I said as resolutely as I could.

She nodded, and touched my hand.

“You have had two losses, Lester,” she began now at once in a booming voice. “But you know only about one of them, I see.”

The words *the truth* seemed to form again and again on my tongue like the first wave of severe nausea.

“As I say,” she was going on, “you have lost two things precious to you. A gift, and a man who loves you very deeply.

“The hand that gave you the gift which you have not been able to locate, that hand has been cold a long time, and will soon turn to dust. You will never see him again in this life.”

I gave out a short cry, but Madame Amelia pointed an outstretched finger at me which would have silenced a whole auditorium.

“Long since turned to dust,” she went on pitilessly. “But the gift which he bestowed on you is not lost.” Her voice was now soft and less scary. “I see a bed, Lester, on which you sleep. . . . The gift so precious to both the giver and the receiver you will find within the mattress. . . in a small opening.”

I do not even remember leaving Madame Amelia’s, or recall working the rest of the afternoon in the popcorn concession. . . . I do know I ran most of the way home.

Mama was giving a big party for her bridge club, and for once she was in a good humor, so she said very little to me as I rushed past upstairs to my bedroom.

Mama always made my bed so good, I hated to take off the hand-sewn coverlet and the immaculate just-changed and ironed sheet, but I had to know if Madame Amelia was telling me the truth. . . . I hoped and

prayed she was wrong, that she had lied, and that I would not find the watch, for if that part of the fortune was not true, neither would be the other part about the hand of the bestower.

I searched and searched but could find no little aperture where my watch would have slipped down in the mattress, until when about to give up, all at once I see under one of the button-like doohickeys a sort of small opening. . . . My hand delved down, my heart came into my mouth, I felt the cold metal, I pulled it out, it was my gold watch.

But instead of the joy at having it back, I felt as bad as if I had killed somebody. Sitting there with the timepiece which I now wound carefully, I lost all track of my surroundings. I sat there on the unmade bed for I don't know how long, hardly looking at my long-lost friend, which ticked on and on uncomfortably.

"Lester?" I heard Mama's troubled voice, "Why, where on earth did you ever get that beautiful watch?"

I looked up at her, and then I told it all to her. . . .

She looked at the tousled condition of sheets, coverlet, and mattress, but there come from her no criticism or scolding.

She held the watch now in her own palm and gazed at it carefully but sort of absentmindedly.

"You should have told me, Lester, and not kept it locked in your own heart all this time. You should confide in Mama more. Just look at you, too, you're growing into a handsome young man right in front of my eyes."

A queer kind of sob escaped from her. . . .

"Where is Short Papa, do you suppose?" I got out at last as she took my hand.

Mama smoothed my hair briefly, then she went on:

"I have wondered and wondered how I was to tell you all these months, Lester, and I see that as usual I must have did the wrong thing where you and Short Papa are concerned. But you realize I learned of his death weeks after the event. . . . And then weeks and weeks after that I heard he had been buried in accord with his firm instructions that there was to be no funeral and nobody was to be notified back here of his passing. . . ."

I nodded, meaning I did not blame her, but kept looking hard at the watch, and thinking there could be no place safe enough now for it, and that it must never part from me again.

"I've always wanted to do what was best, Lester," Mama went on,

“but parents too are only after all flesh and blood as someday you will find out for yourself.”

She dried her eyes on her tea apron and then touched me softly on the cheek and started to make up the bed, and at the very last to make a final touch she got out her old-fashioned bedspread from the cedar chest and put that over the rayon coverlet.

A SENSE OF THINGS

by David St. John

The door is open. You are afraid
The father of the house is out negligently
Basking, in the shade
Of a nocturnal fern. Did he leave
A note for you, a trail? This snail shell
Is empty, but that means nothing.
You can hear the ice clatter in the next room,
As your hostess fixes drinks. At first,
You thought the party was another night, but now
Everyone's arriving in bright costumes, limp satin
Hats. Now tip the shell, just
A bit. Out tumbles the glass scarab onto your palm!
A bunch of colors gather and ruffle in its belly.
You slide it back into the empty snail shell,
Utterly content. You smile, smooth your feathered hair.

Volume 35, Numbers 2/3 Spring/Summer 1977

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Murder

BY MARY GORDON

Volume 37, Number 1 Winter 1979

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The young men looked up at the great doctor as Adam looked at God before the birth of Eve. Their humility made them younger, their perfect expectations. He took off his spectacles; he took a drink of water: both were signs of the depths of his sorrows. Part of his greatness was his understanding that there were minds he could not help. He was not like some of the others, who believed all things explicable. He believed in mystery, in paradox, in final, irrevocable grief. Anyone could see this; it was too, too painfully visible from the graying of his eyes that were once, it was said, the color of cornflowers, from the stooped arc of his shoulders that were once wide and upright as a young steer's. Now he looked at the young men, doctors themselves, and they were silent, as a tribute, not only to his learning, but to his sorrows. There were thirty seconds of silence before he began speaking. It was a perfect silence: it could have been no more perfect if calculated.

"I will tell you the story of a beautiful young woman whose case I believe to be hopeless."

Hopeless. At the word, the silence became convex, as if the audience had as a man sucked in air. Each of the young men was thinking: it is a mark of his greatness that he talks even about the minds he has failed to cure. In the audience of doctors there was one woman doctor. She opened her pen. The old man went on.

"The woman lived in a small town in Switzerland. In the town was a young man whom one might say she worshipped from afar. We will call the young man Tomas. We will call the woman Lisel."

The young men imagined Tomas and Lisel. The young woman imagined the roofs of the houses in the Swiss town. She imagined the woman Lisel opening a window.

"Lisel was convinced that Tomas did not know of her existence. He did not seem to notice her; he paid attention to other girls in the town, but not to her. Slowly, over a period of years, she convinced herself that she should look elsewhere for marriage. At twenty-three, she married the local banker, whom we shall call Heinz. They moved to Zurich, where he became a bank manager."

The young men shifted in their seats, trying to find *the* posture of perfect attention. The young woman buttoned one button on the cuff of her blouse, which she saw now was open.

"Her marriage was not a love match, but a happy one. The center of her life was her children, on whom she lavished the warm and quick affection that would have gone, in a more passionate union, to her husband. When she had regrets about the coldness of her marriage, she told herself that it was worth it, everything was worth it for her two beautiful children."

The young woman doctor saw a young woman in gray voile, walking with her children in a Zurich park on a Sunday. She saw the husband, stiff in a bowler hat, but not unhappy, walking somewhat behind them. She could see Lisel cupping one hand to urge her children forward.

"When she had been married nine years, a school chum of hers came for coffee."

The young woman imagined the coffee cups: white with a border of blue. She imagined the position of the bodies at the table. Lisel, her friends, her husband. Was her husband present? Yes, she was sure the husband was present.

"Lisel's school chum said playfully to her, 'Do you remember Tomas?' Lisel felt a small flutter of anxiety: she was afraid that after all these years her love had been found out."

Anxiety, guilt, thought the young men. The young woman remembered anxiety as a stitch between her breasts.

"Lisel's school chum looked playfully at Lisel's husband. 'You didn't know our Lisel was a heart breaker,' she said. Lisel told me later that she remembered this conversation perfectly, every word, as if it were a scene from a play."

As if it had all taken place outdoors on a very cold night, the sky a clear, murderous blue, so that all shapes seem to have been cut out of it, thought the young woman.

“Lisel remembered that her husband took her hand and said, in the same playful spirit as her school chum, ‘I believe my wife to be capable of anything.’”

The young men in the audience shifted anxiously. The young woman was thinking of the cold blue of the sky. She was sure it had happened in winter.

“Lisel’s school chum went on. ‘Tomas is divorced now. He is a friend of my husband’s. One night he was talking seriously to me about the failure of his marriage. He said he only married that woman because of our Lisel here. He had always loved her, but he became convinced that she had no time for him, and when she married you, Heinz, he moved away and made that disastrous marriage.’ Lisel said at that moment she felt pure panic.”

Panic, thought the young men. Deriving from the god Pan. Panic, thought the young woman, I feel in the soles of my feet.

“Lisel’s husband and her school chum laughed at the story, Lisel remembered. She felt, she said, nothing then: a haze or a numbness. She got up to give her children their bath.”

The bathwater, the young woman thought, was cloudy with soap. She was washed over by the words of her friend, by the laughter of her husband: a wave the color of the bathwater. She looked at her children through a clouded wave.

“I have neglected to tell you that in the city at that time there was a typhoid epidemic. And so, of course, no one could drink any water, unless it had been boiled first. Having heard the news about Tomas, with whom she had been in love for years, she was thinking of him as she sat near her children at their bath.”

She was thinking of his eyes, the color of cornflowers, of his hands, broad and brown, with their square nails, as she sat near her children at their bath, thought the young woman.

“As children do, one of Lisel’s children put the wash cloth in his mouth and sucked on it. His brother began to imitate him and sucked on his wash cloth. But Lisel was so busy dreaming of her lover that she did not stop her children, who were, in front of her, drinking contaminated water.”

The wave, gray-green, the color of clouded water, broke on her head. The young woman could feel it. She had dreamt about her lover and her

children were dead. The wave had gone on breaking, pulling her under. Even the greatest doctor could not help her.

The old man stood up. "When this woman told me her story, I realized *I had on my hands a latent murderer.*"

The young men buzzed with shocked approval. They might have applauded. It was clear: she wanted to kill her husband, but she killed her children instead. Of course. How clever was the mind bent on destruction.

The young woman could see the faces of the children, pale, the color of pastry, sweating in their white beds. And dressed for their coffins, their hair cut, dressed in their best outfits. She thought: this woman did not want to murder these children. To think of a lover is not to murder a child. But surely the doctor knew this, with his belief in fate, in chance, in paradox. She would say the truth that he, because he was a great man, wanted to hear. She raised her hand. He called her name. He smiled at her. She warmed and burnished under his perfectly generous glance. In some ways, she thought, she was his favorite.

"Surely," she said, "we must not equate a case of simple negligence with a desire to kill one's child."

The old man no longer smiled. His eyes were sharp bits of metal now; they cut into her flesh. She put her hand to her throat.

"We do not help our patients by reducing the complexity of their hidden desires to a simplistic level. When I say the woman was a latent murderer, I do not judge her."

She was alone in the room now. None of the young men, none of her friends would look at her. She was alone, but she was not frightened. She believed the old man to be wrong. She would not lower her gaze as long as his was directed towards her.

Suddenly, the old man put his hand to his chest. He sat down and leaned his head back. Everyone in the audience had the same thought: his heart—he had a weak heart. And if he died now, everyone would believe that she had killed him. But she had simply told the truth. Even now, she believed him to be wrong. Even if he were dying, she believed him to be wrong. She had, simply, told the truth.

She was the first of the doctors to get to him. She loosened his collar. She poured him a glass of water.

"It is the strain," said one of the young men, "of a great and a generous heart. It must not wear itself out, with love, with understanding, with compassion."

The old doctor opened his eyes and smiled at the young man. The young woman was taking his pulse. His pulse was normal; his forehead was warm, but not feverish. He would go on in good health, she thought, for another twenty years.

The New Female Literary Culture

BY ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE

Volume 38, Number 2 Spring 1980

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For as long as I can remember, books by women have mattered to me, and in the most compelling ways. Not exactly that I found those books objectively more important than the others. The prevailing standards taught me they were not. But they were probably more important to me. I just never thought much about my ready acceptance of standards that had no place for so many of the works of literature that nourished my soul. Such devotion to the writing of other women should certainly qualify me for membership in our female literary culture — if only as a loyal camp follower. My unwillingness to label what was most important to me as what was most important in the literary culture — or hierarchy — probably reflects an unease that characterizes female literary culture as a whole.

Female literary culture has been a step-child of our general literary culture. It may be, as Ann Douglas argues in *The Feminization of American Culture*, that our whole culture has been feminized, that women's books not merely sell incomparably more copies than literary masterpieces — Mrs. Sigourney more than Melville or Hawthorne — but that

women's concerns have emasculated the cultural mainstream itself. It remains nonetheless true that men have dominated the hierarchy of literary prestige, not to mention its institutional bases.

Both the prestige and the institutional bases force our careful thinking about what we mean by a literary culture. Surely, the foundations must be sought in writers and readers, just as the substance must be sought in shared values and discomforts. But the access of writers to readers is socially constructed: the publishing, marketing, and reviewing of books obey more complex laws than those of simple aesthetic excellence. And the publishing, marketing, reviewing themselves shape the standards that define excellence, the joys, humor, and tragedies by which the members of the culture shape their image of themselves. If the cultural perspective remains male, as it largely has, then female writers must either conform to it, accept a separate and secondary sphere, or, worst of all, become shrill and demanding in their protests. In the first instance, they are accepted as exceptions, honorary members in the male club — which itself extracts its price in cutting them off from the well-springs of female experience and criticism. In the second, they subside into peripheral status, drawing strength from the commitment of their readers, but sacrificing — let us face it — the demands of the most stringent professional competition. In the last, and most painfully unfair, they appear to sin most woefully against prevailing standards: sinning against the disinterested purity of style, they fall from cultural grace itself.

Since the rise of a secular literary culture, woman upon woman, but most influentially Virginia Woolf, has made us feel the exclusion of pressing one's nose against the glass of literary culture. For, as Woolf so firmly grasped, privacy, an assured income, conversation, respect, and good wine anchor art for its own sake in the here-and-now of socially validated literary work.

It has become commonplace to recognize female literary culture as hedged in by domesticity. We all — or those of us who care about such matters — know of Jane Austen's writing in the midst of the family circle, Mrs. Gaskell's and Kate Chopin's writing among the throng of children, and Emily Dickinson's choosing to confine herself in her father's house. In our own time, Margaret Drabble has dismissed the determining effect of women's domestic shackles, proclaiming that all we need do is organize — not our politics, but our private lives. The woman writer must learn to snatch every spare minute, to read on the bus, to read stirring the soup and chopping the veggies, to read nursing the infant and changing its nappies. In so readily espousing the myth of the superwoman, Drab-

ble is probably reacting against Virginia Woolf, is surely selling short the real limitations domestic life imposes on most women, but is also validating the long preoccupation with domesticity that has characterized the Anglo-American female literary culture.

Elizabeth Hardwick has been more skeptical about the possibilities of the tradition. She sees women as cut off from the roots of cultural strength, cut off from the range of experience that must inform a vigorous culture. Women cannot write like men because they have not been free to roam the world, to court danger, to test the limits of their being, to war with each other and grapple with power. Hardwick intends her argument as an answer to accusations of innate female inferiority. But her defense, in attesting to the existence of a separate and recognizable female literary culture, implicitly accepts not merely the lesser standing, but also the inferior complexity and vigor of that culture.

Tillie Olsen, more intransigently than others, sets forth the conditions of female literary culture. In *Silences*, she explores the words not written, the craft not practiced. Olsen's power derives in no small measure from her explicit recognition of social class. In her words, the thanklessness of housework, the drain of childcare, the exigencies of earning a living come to life. She evokes bone-weariness, raw knuckles, chafed skin, mental anguish as the real stuff of life. Olsen, too, has her moments of radiant vision, her special knowledge of the red-gold vermillion, cascading from the embers. But she is cautious about mystifying the transcendence of domesticity. Never minimizing the ties that bind all women, she remains deeply in touch with the hard work and economic dependence that specially mark the lives of the majority of women.

The conditions so poignantly evoked by Olsen can also clarify the tastes of that readership which constitutes the bedrock of female literary culture. One might read her depiction of the constraints on female literary production to elucidate the preferences of female readers. Women caught in the coils of a dying patriarchy wrap their imaginations around the dilemma of a masculine power both feared and revered. Women indentured to marriage as the only escape from their parents' homes, the only alternative to the most routinized, underpaid, and debilitating jobs, remain mesmerized by romance — by true love as escape and self-realization. (The producers of male literary culture also face problems of readership, of class differences, of the market. Pain whines through innumerable male novels. But it is the pain of those who have enjoyed certain telling advantages that they sense are being eroded. And male literary culture is another subject.)

In the past decade or two, the women's movement has prompted an extensive discussion of female exclusion from the dominant literary culture and the depiction of women by that culture. The movement has also generated a renewed interest in the female literary culture as a coherent subculture with a structure and traditions of its own. The late Ellen Moers and Elaine Showalter have revealed the links that bound women writers to each other's work, the problems that women writers explored, the historical development of female literary preoccupations. In a related vein, Nina Auerbach has written of women's persistent concern with communities of women. Most recently, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have attempted to understand women writers' relationship to the nineteenth-century literary imagination under the organizing theme, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Such works, whatever their differences, reflect the prevailing determination to understand female literary culture as an articulation of female being. In one way or another, they all probe the possibilities of female self-expression. Although none of them is properly sociological, they all acknowledge the relevance of the social conditions of female lives to the products of the female imagination. Growing out of the contemporary movement, these works and the myriad of others are contributing to the construction of a female literary past that will be something more than a chronicle of Lady Writers — that will endow female literary production with the structure and attributes of a culture.

In time we shall need more. Women particularly know that to accept an idealist conception of culture is to surrender their aspirations. The canons of stylistic excellence, to say nothing of the chosen preoccupations of the great tradition, leave scant place for female cultural voices. We must have a solid historical and contemporary sociology of women's literary culture. Records of sales, when available, are important. So are relative payments, advances, royalty arrangements for male and female authors. And we need to know more about the cultural network as a whole. Which works were reviewed where and by whom? Which publications included female editors, and how many? What were the relative circulation figures of male and female cultural publications? What was the relationship between sexual identification, circulation figures, and cultural prestige? How consistent was thematic orientation between "popular" and "high" culture, by sexual identification? I raise this question only because I suspect that *Redbook* has more in common with *Signs* than *Popular Mechanics*, *Penthouse*, or *Sports Illustrated* do with *Foreign Affairs*, *Partisan Review*, or *Commentary*. And I suspect that the rela-

tively strong bond between “popular” and “high” female culture obtained in the nineteenth century as well.

But even a more sophisticated sociology of female literary culture will not tell the whole story. However problematic precise delineations may be, female literary culture is as much a matter of theme as of institutions. Not all women writers are engaged in the female literary culture, although many sharp critics of feminist writing must be numbered among its members, even if espousing an adversary relationship. Rooted in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century domestic experience of women, female literary culture remains anchored in the problems of female being and consciousness.

If contemporary female literary culture cannot be understood independent of the women’s movement, it cannot be identified with feminism per se. But feminism has posed the decisive questions about how to be, to think, to write as a woman. Female literary culture is made up of differing female perspectives on who we are and what we should become. Beneath the various interpretations, however, lurk the dominant themes of female sexuality, the place of marriage, home, family, true love in a woman’s life — the separatist and integrationist attitudes towards male consciousness.

Thinking about female literary culture tempts us into thinking of it, like so much other movement activity, as a network. But if the public network can be found in the widely distributed, even best-selling books, this official presence is drawn from tremendous regional and personal variation. New York provides a kind of official stamp to female literary culture, as to our culture at large. But along with the voices of New York, which differ among themselves, we have distinctive regional voices from California, the South, the Midwest. And rich, vital Canadian voices are becoming important influences in American female literary culture, as the English voices have always been. Increasingly, women of different ethnic backgrounds are reclaiming the special character of their own experience, even as they cast it in dominant female problems.

But it is difficult to establish systematic patterns of contact and influence, aside from the evidence of the texts themselves. The movement has prompted the founding of journals, magazines, publishing houses; but simply listing them tells us precious little. *Signs* clearly has emerged as the elite academic publication devoted to and edited by women. But, even when it deals with contemporary literary culture, it staunchly — and appropriately — protects its flank of academic respectability. I really do not want to get bogged down in the tiresome quarrels about high culture,

popular culture, academic culture, that have been bequeathed to us by American modernist sensibilities. For anyone who takes the social roots and social life of culture seriously, these distinctions obscure more than they clarify. But *Signs* does publish lots of footnotes and no fiction.

Ms has firmly established itself as the most commercially successful organ of the national women's movement. Sharing format and tone with *New York* magazine, from which it sprang, it has, its glossy trendiness notwithstanding, held to its feminist and liberationist principles. Although not, properly speaking, a literary magazine at all, *Ms* does publish female writers, particularly middle-class ones from New York, speaking not so much about literature as about Bloomingdales, sisters, divorce, attitudes towards food and clothing, and so forth. If both *Signs* and *Ms* are vulnerable to dismissal by men and criticism by women, they nonetheless play an invaluable role. They have given us footholds in the consumer marketplace and in the halls of academia: *Signs* is published by the University of Chicago Press, for heaven's sake! And it behooves us to take comfort in their having made it because of their commercial viability. The real world of women's employment looks grim enough. At least the pitiful share of the country's earnings that belong to women is contributing to some semblance of a female culture.

For better or worse, if female culture is to attain a significant and independent place in national life, it must struggle for every foothold in the prevailing social and economic system. I do not mean that commercial viability and academic respectability on the going terms will suffice. We are all too familiar with the commanding arguments that success on male terms robs female culture of its distinctive character. Nor, however, can I accept that women have a special and unchanging purity that protects them against the corrupting influences that beset men. All too often, the purity of feminist principles and dearth of feminist resources have tended to reinforce each other. *Feminist Studies*, the first of the academic organs of the movement, wavered on the verge of extinction before being saved by the University of Maryland. *Frontiers* apparently enjoys support from the University of Colorado. *Chrysalis*, a purely literary magazine, in the category of the small magazine, has an impressive circulation of 10,000 but still depends upon outside funding. And there are a host of others, like *Quest*, *Heresies*, or the *New Women's Times*, which struggle along.

The movement has also generated a rash of feminist publishing houses, most notably Feminist Press, which grew out of the women's studies program at SUNY-Old Westbury, and Les Femmes. These

houses, like Virago in England, have performed an important service in publishing reprints of buried female classics, scholarship, and contemporary feminist literature. But they and their sister houses lack the capitalization and distribution of the major publishing firms, which are themselves all too ready to capitalize on the female market, although not to promote feminist principles or support unknown feminist authors. Nothing precludes a large commercial house's picking up and actively pushing a feminist novel — to wit the stunning successes enjoyed by Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (not really all that feminist) and, more recently, Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*. But, too frequently, women do not have final authority over which women writers benefit from active promotion, much less over who reviews them in which publications.

Even in those instances in which women hold the reins, as at *Ms*, prevailing tastes, the trends of fashion, and the market play a determining role. As female culture moves into the world, it becomes subject to the same social and economic forces as the general culture. The Lord knows I am not arguing that culturally and politically "pure" work can, by definition, never be successful. Whatever criticisms one may have of Jong and French, it is delightful to see them jostling Marabel Morgan at supermarket checkouts. But there is the danger of the new female literary culture's finding itself shoved back towards, and ever more dependent on, a mass market, the values and sensibilities of which it is pressed to conform to. Where the politics, the traditional networks, of our cultural life still matter — on which novels do publishers risk losses for reasons of prestige? — women may suffer. Feminist work is infrequently subsidized as a *succès d'estime*.

Even a cursory review of the most prestigious cultural journals and magazines yields the depressing recognition that women as women still command far less than their fair share of what remains of a highbrow culture. The *New York Times Book Review* plays a special role in mediating between the intellectuals and the mass market. And women fare unevenly, which means only occasionally well, in its pages. But the *New York Review of Books*, *Commentary*, the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and the other custodians of "serious" culture, together with most of the small magazines, have been less than hospitable to the female literary culture. And women command no comparable publication of their own. Members of the female literary culture no longer face total exclusion from these publications. But, overwhelmingly, they appear in their pages as individuals on sufferance. The especially enlightened jour-

nals occasionally run a special issue on women. Few indeed treat the problems of female culture as of regular and equal interest on their own terms. And most of the women who have become genuine members of the club have, somewhere along the way, earned their spurs as critics of feminism, or have, from the outset, written as if gender were irrelevant to the life of the mind. Under these conditions, female literary culture as a reasonably coherent enterprise has been unable to make its presence felt among those most committed to the defense of “culture.”

Signs and *Ms* are, therefore, all the more significant in delineating the institutional limits of female literary culture. The mass market and academic institutions, encouraged by federal government funding and its equal-opportunity guidelines, have provided at least minimal support and institutional grounding for female culture. But those very cultural institutions that have prided themselves on serving as the critical and innovative voice in a philistine world—the guardians of serious intellectual and literary life—have strenuously resisted any significant inclusion of women in their ranks and any serious attention to female literary culture.

Given these limiting conditions, contemporary female literary culture has built its networks as it has been able to. Many literary women continue to work within a family setting, although more frequently than their predecessors with a door they can close. Many others enjoy some contact with the academic world. Full- and part-time teachers of literature and creative writing, literary women like Gail Godwin, Alison Lurie, Alix Kates Shulman, Adrienne Rich, Diane Johnson, Marilyn French, and others have some access to offices and contact with university life. Women’s studies programs across the country have, within the limits of their budgets, offered hospitality to literary women as scholars-in-residence or outside speakers. This network of collegiality and sisterhood has brought together women—teachers, students, and writers—with similar concerns. Literary women in New York meet under such auspices at Barnard, Rutgers, the New School, New York University. They also meet, or met for years, in the women’s groups that sprang up around the city in the late sixties and early seventies. They travel across the country speaking, meeting with other women, sitting into the morning hours sharing wine and thoughts.

Outside of New York, the female literary culture seeks roots in women’s studies programs in places as far-flung as Arizona and Cornell, Colorado and Old Westbury. The National Women’s Studies Association annually brings together women from all over the country. The National

Endowment for the Humanities, the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, the Rockefeller Foundation, and many others fund projects pertaining to female literary culture in the broadest sense. There is something staggering in the simple recognition of how many women know each other. Or how, not knowing, can nonetheless call each other for information, to participate in a panel, to give a reading — and can call on the assumption of a degree of cordiality that derives from a common project.

Our female literary culture is deeply rooted in this network of intellectual — employed, unemployed, half-employed — women. Many of us grew up with the same addiction to books, especially women's books, and caught up in a society that appeared to offer us no position of respect as women. There was indeed a self-preoccupation in the female literary culture that grew with the movement. But the harshest critics, Midge Decter, Joan Didion, Diana Trilling — from whom the bludgeoning Norman Mailers might have taken lessons in acerbity — really missed the point. For the self-preoccupation was more a social than a personal phenomenon. And for better or worse, the women who were giving it literary expression were, as a group, shaping the ideology and the self-perceptions of women all across the country. However harshly one may judge the political limitations of this middle-class female literary culture, it has had an important cultural unity. And, like bourgeois culture in the great revolutionary epoch, it has contained within itself the seeds of both a more radical and a more reactionary political sensibility.

The contemporary female literary culture can be distinguished by its thematic unity, even more than by its institutional networks. If Sylvia Plath, followed by Anne Sexton and Adrienne Rich, pointed the way, a ground swell of female literary production from the late sixties identified and started to explore a recognizable complex of themes. Indebted to Virginia Woolf, more for her essays than for the specific cast of her fiction, the new wave of female literature reached back to the great domestic tradition of women's fiction. Simultaneously, it grappled with the problems of the unhappy post-modern consciousness that were surfacing in the postwar male literary culture. Fluctuating between these two poles of how to be a woman and how to be at all in the

contemporary world, women started to write about the making and being of a modern woman.

The classic novel of modern womanhood, Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, had been published in England in 1962 but was, for a number of years, to remain something of an underground cult book, passed with reverence from friend to friend. And most of us read it out of context. General familiarity with the Martha Quest series came later, as did the possibilities for assessing Lessing's dilemmas about possible endings for the story of the modern woman. By 1969, when *The Four-Gated City* appeared, and a different reading of *The Golden Notebook* became possible, the American and Canadian waves of female self-exploration were under way.

Margaret Drabble had published the first in her chronicle of the middle-class female life, *A Summer Bird-Cage*, in 1963. For the next decade, novels that depicted the succession of postuniversity female bachelorhood, marriage, child-rearing, and divorce would drop from her swift pen in a steady flow. But again, a substantial American audience did not really begin to take note until *The Needle's Eye* appeared in an American paperback in 1973. Of all the British voices, including such original and disparate ones as Iris Murdoch, Edna O'Brien (may the Irish forgive me), Fay Weldon, Beryl Bainbridge, and Antonia Byatt, Drabble's spoke most directly to the preoccupations of American women. Significantly, as the American tradition of contemporary womanhood took on distinctive form, Drabble's novels were all reissued in American paperbacks and are all now in print.

A number of American female authors, who would later be identified with the new women's literature, began their careers before the great explosion of the early seventies. Allowing for the uncertain and quiet reception of most first novels, it is nonetheless striking that Joan Didion, Judith Rossner, Alison Lurie, Anne Tyler, Margaret Atwood (Canadian), had published novels before 1970 that would receive wide distribution only after the impact of the women's movement had begun to be felt. Already, however, their works were addressing precisely those questions that the movement would bring to general attention.

The seventies opened with the publication of Lois Gould's *Such Good Friends*. Gould's searing treatment of a wife's discovery of her husband's meticulous record of his infidelities (the rankings point the way to "10") opened fire on the self-pitying male worryings over how to be a man by freeing oneself from Mom and her grasping, soul-withering successor, Wife. Suddenly, women were permitted their own view of

Portnoy, et al. Gail Godwin's *The Perfectionist*, published in the same year, did not receive comparable attention. But Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays*, also featuring the woman's point of view on the shambles that once was marriage, left an indelible mark. The thruways of California — the blank-out space of the domestic wasteland, the recovery of cradle-rocking (the anxiety-assuaging speed), and the bottle (Coke after Coke) — painfully evoked a woman's isolation as she broke out from the house. Carrying her domestic imprint like a turtle his shell, she rode the thruways — out and moving, but with no place but home to go. Didion was giving us a female *Rabbit, Run*.

Marriage, as the present woe of most women old enough to be writing novels, was the first subject of the new female wave. But Alix Kates Shulman, publishing *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* in 1972, explicitly linked the marital plight to the early training of girls. Evoking the Middletowns of the middle American, middle West, she placed New York, and by implication California, within the framework of all those young women who had been drawn to it — who, having been reared in the heartland of American domesticity and schooled in the norms of American femininity, sought jobs, or education, or just breaking away. The postwar boom in corporate, advertising, and intellectual careers had pulled men from the towns all over the country. Their moans of pain had been codified into an esteemed literature of alienation, absurdity, and despair. But what of the women? How, in the name of time, did one recover from having been a prom queen, or from having failed to become one?

For all Shulman's use of "memoirs" in her title, she was already embarked on writing the socially rooted *Bildungsroman* — a project she would pursue with uncommon intelligence and craft in *Burning Questions*. Her mode, however much it may have been misunderstood, was never properly confessional. But her theme derived from the same cultural moment that would generate untold confessions of the female becoming. The early seventies insistently posed the problem of a viable female identity. Consciousness-raising groups had unraveled the questions, exposed the pain, and cultivated the habit of self-exploration. They had also taught innumerable women to apprehend their own angers, first to unleash them personally, next to name them as a social phenomenon.

Rapidly, the appropriate targets of the anger began to be identified: husbands, of course, but then marriage as an institution; the intractability of childcare (however valued); and then back to the nuclear family of origin, and especially to mothers. Psychiatrists, perceived as those who

claimed to help women find comfort in their assigned lives and roles, came in for their share of attacks. Freud became a kind of code word for patriarchal molding of female minds, the better to deny female consciousness. Scores of Little Red Riding Hoods discovered in print that where they had sought comfort they could expect to be eaten.

If the culture took shape in the writings of women who sought escape from a claustrophobic, mind-manacled domesticity, it also featured defenders of the older roles. Anne Roiphe, herself married to a psychiatrist, self-proclaimed happy mother, sang the praises of wifedom and motherhood in *Up the Sandbox*. Ominously, Roiphe, a smart lady, acknowledged the pull of independent roles for women, but cast them as daydreams, improbable fantasies, not options. More subtly but to the same end, Sue Kaufman in *Diary of a Mad Housewife* celebrated a woman's autonomous pleasure in arranging and ordering, her chosen image being the well-stocked cupboard. Both, however, wrote in the prevailing confessional mode. And both cast their solutions as autonomous female choices, given the social and biological possibilities. Both, moreover, assimilated the more explicit demands for female sexual fulfillment.

Roiphe and Kaufman enjoyed a telling advantage. However they got there, they had endings. Furthermore, the women's movement and the new female literary culture reinforced those endings. For the endings embodied not some mindless replay of the older domestic tradition, but a choice — a resolution against other options, hence, a new action. Endings, which were already posing such problems for male novelists, would trouble other women writers as well. Shulman, in *Memoirs*, had had the marvelous sense to leave the ending ambiguous. Others rapidly found themselves forced into the conventions of marriage, love, or new beginnings — one or another new life, when it was perfectly clear the old one would continue. I suspect that the impossibility of endings drove Lessing from the realism of *The Golden Notebook* to the utopian, fantastic, and science-fiction strategies she has followed since. But Lessing saw all too clearly the rootedness of female being in politics and culture. Having dispensed with politics (Marx) and psychoanalysis (Freud and Jung), and having taken a hard cold look at the odds in favor of true love, she gave up the struggle for the contemporary world in order not to have to give up her work.

But American women writers took longer to face her problems, probably because the women's movement looked so promising, the class structure of American society was less clear, and the dying glow of

sixties' prosperity and radical trends still obscured the likelihood of grim economic and sexual conflicts. By and large, the female literary culture identified the home and the man — in the best American individualist tradition — as the objects of concern. The psychoanalytic sensibility and the rising interest in the influence of mothers on daughters did not seriously challenge this framework. The social and economic system that sustained — perhaps depended on — the consuming middle-class home, presided over by the great socializer and infantilizer, Mom, rarely came in for close scrutiny.

The failure to address the larger context that was producing the men and the mothers endowed female literary culture with its brief moment of optimism. Everything conspired to suggest that the female story was the one remaining success story — provided one could decide how it should end. For a brief moment in the early seventies, women appeared to have a great deal to gain, to have someplace to go. The illusion of possibility runs through this literature like a silver thread. Unlike the anger that gnawed at male literary sensibilities, the anger in female literary sensibilities is directed at the past, not the future. Everything rests on the assumption that, whatever the injustices suffered heretofore, the female protagonist has a life to save, a future to make.

First and foremost, the woman has her sexuality to reclaim. Long victim to the rock-bottom self-loathing of mothers and the patriarchal dictates of men, female sexuality suddenly blossomed forth in all its manifestations. Given that female sexuality has ranked as one of the dominant themes of Western literature, this discovery may seem a touch jejune. But in traditional female writing, sexuality, like anger, had largely been concealed and displaced. The point now was the public repossession by women of their own sexuality — from masturbation to sexual hunger to multiple orgasms to lesbian relations to the objectifying of male pricks. The point was the naming in the possessive voice: woman as subject, as expert on herself, as consumer and judge of men. This emergence from furtiveness, not so much from closets as from back seats, darkened living rooms, damp bushes, was heady stuff. It took a moment to understand that sexual liberation and female autonomy were not necessarily synonymous, that if female autonomy depended upon sexual self-possession, uncensored female sexuality was perfectly compatible with a renewed domestic subordination. In a few years, female literary culture caught up with the freedom won by male writers since the repeal of the Comstock laws.

The publication of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, in 1973, brought the

sexual forthrightness of the new female literary culture to the attention of the American public at large. Widely marketed as an explicit pronouncement of female erotics, *Fear of Flying* attracted an attention unlike that accorded previous female novels. (Actually, the novel was not all that daring.) *Fear of Flying* was publicized as realizing the worst male fears and the most lascivious male fantasies about the sexually liberated woman. In this respect, the novel brought the new female literary culture into the public spotlight. But the public translation of female concerns into marketing formulae was to prove a mixed blessing. Jong surely invited some measure of the sensationalist reception, but she was also trying to write a serious book. And she explicitly located her heroine in the world of the upper-middle-class intelligentsia. In addition she drew upon a psychoanalytic sensibility to explore the nature of female dependence and masochism, even as she exposed the sexist institutions that bound women to their most fearful selves. *Fear of Flying* thus joined a rhetoric of female sexual liberation to a recognition of persisting — partially internalized — female bondage. The protagonist, Isadora Wing, comes at the end to like herself. Alone in a sleazy hotel room in Paris, she accepts her body as hers and herself as okay. *Fear of Flying* includes all the themes of the new female literary culture, draws upon the major strands of middle-class female experience. Jong skillfully weaves together the problems of parents and siblings, the yearning to be “ordinary,” the importance of books as protection from life and source of identifications, writing as the privileged form of work, attitudes towards one’s body and towards menstruation, the disillusionments of modern marriages, the failures of psychoanalysis, the female need to serve or otherwise subordinate self, the vulnerability of a woman alone. Jong even shows Isadora contemplating the uncertainty of her future, accepting not to know whether her marriage will end. The concluding chapter of *Fear of Flying* is, nonetheless, entitled “A 19th-Century Ending.” Isadora returns to her husband to wait to see if she will leave him. It is not, Jong suggests, so much the social institutions as the internal personal changes that matter.

Fear of Flying is pivotal in the emergence of a new female literary culture. In particular, it demonstrates how easily a reactionary — or at least socially complacent — road for women’s liberation could branch off from feminism. For Jong, like others after her, retreats from the insight that personal solutions are socially rooted. Like the psychoanalysis of which she is, in so many respects, critical, she basically comes down on the side of adaptation and internal freedom. Her second novel, *How to*

Save Your Own Life, made this strand in her work dominant. Meanwhile, the rapid retreat to conventional marriage, albeit purportedly on the basis of a raised female consciousness, figures prominently in Lois Gould's *Final Analysis* and a host of lesser efforts. Middle-class aspirations still, correctly, saw marriage as the indispensable — if ever less reliable — foundation of female economic and social survival. The Jong and Gould model, moreover, functioned simultaneously to assimilate the upper-middle-class woman's adjustment to the two-career marriage to the lower-class woman's desperate recognition of her dependence on a male paycheck. What fell by the wayside in these works was any discussion of why women so deeply needed and wanted the marital structure — as social and economic armor — against which they rebelled.

Over the next five years, the themes of sexuality and dependence versus independence remained prominent. Female literary culture continued to privilege the saga of the individual woman or groups of women. The confessional mode of Jong — in contradistinction to the mode of the *Bildungsroman* — was picked up by Gould in *Final Analysis*, by Gail Greene in *Blue Skies, No Candy*, by Jill Robinson in *Bed-Time Story*, by Francine DuPlessix Gray in *Lovers and Tyrants*, by Anne Roiphe in *Torch Song*, and many others. This confessional mode was characterized by a particular kind of personal voice. Much like Woody Allen's recent films, it personalized social context, reducing it to familiar reference points, in-group jokes, or simply the external structure of the engrossing question of how I became who I am. To this personalist sensibility, it joined a kind of picaresque romp through beds, couches, and marriages. I hate myself for my unfairness in this cavalier lumping and dismissal; but I hate even more the snide criticism of the new female literature that precludes my being even harsher.

The new female literary culture has suffered from a relative lack of serious critical attention. Cheap putdowns no more qualify as criticism than do publishers' blurbs about the daring new voices, the frankness, the uncompromising looks at female sexuality. Any literary culture extends beyond its most gifted exponents. Our female literary culture includes not merely different degrees of talent, but different degrees of thematic seriousness. The culture has grown up around a complex of problems that many critics dismiss out of hand as trivial. Growing out of the domestic experience that male culture so fran-

tically seeks to escape, female literature inevitably must come to terms with experiences that, by definition, have been denied public significance. Critics like Diana Trilling and Midge Decter are only too happy to point out that the endings of female novels belie the promise of liberation: women remain as masochistically trapped by their own sexuality as ever; women have renounced the complexities of sexual encounter, the willingness to deal with men as other. (Which distinguishes them from Updike, Roth, and company?) Joan Didion is worth quoting at length:

To those of us who remain committed mainly to the exploration of moral distinctions and ambiguities, the feminist analysis may have seemed a particularly narrow and cracked determinism. . . .

More and more, as the literature of the movement began to reflect the thinking of women who did not really understand the movement's ideological base one had the sense of this stall, this delusion, the sense that the drilling of the theorists had struck only some psychic hardpan dense with superstitions and little sophistries, wish fulfillment, self-loathing and bitter fancies. . . .

Increasingly it seemed that the aversion was to adult sexual life itself: how much cleaner to stay forever children. . . . The derogation of assertiveness as "machismo" has achieved such currency that one imagines several million women too delicate to deal at any level with an overtly heterosexual man. . . .

The astral discontent with actual lives, actual men, the denial of the real generative possibilities of adult sexual life, somehow touches beyond words. . . . These are converts who want not a revolution but "romance," who believe not in the oppression of women but in their own chances for a new life in exactly the mold of their old life.

Didion's polemical skill has never been in doubt. Like many flashy polemicists, she is not altogether inaccurate (if a little vague about the specific objects of her attack), just staggeringly unfair. Rushing in for the easy shots, she never stops to ask, Why? Why should women simultaneously reject prevailing sexual relationships, yet persist in craving love or marriage? Why should so many women be so ambivalent about dependence and independence? But then it takes a special kind of courage to accept fully that the rage and fear of women who live in fear of rape, who confront sexual harassment on the job and off, who know their own weakness, may have something to do with female experience in general. How much better to be an exception — labeled simply as being mature. For it takes another kind of courage to respect the serious — even when not successful — attempt of women to forge a literary culture faithful to female experience, even if that culture does not conform to the sensibilities and stylistic standards of the dominant male literary culture. Any struggling, new culture appears raw to the custodians of the established hierarchy: Christians appeared embarrassingly serious and grace-

less compared to the stylized elegance of the late Hellenistic world, the Puritans uncouth to Restoration wits, and so forth. Female literary culture must be taken seriously on its own terms before we can begin to discriminate among its practitioners.

Given the statistics on divorce, wife-battering, and rape, to say nothing of the complaints of men themselves, it is difficult to accept that all is well in the world of mature heterosexuality. The construct of normal adult love is as much a fantasy as the myth of the all-American family. Distressingly old-fashioned in my personal commitments, I nonetheless find it rash to underestimate how deeply we are all hostage to a troubled social environment. Similarly, to denigrate a self-consciously feminist literary culture as trivial or rigidly ideological is to take schizophrenic distance on oneself as a woman. It perpetuates the myth of a gender-blind culture, the myth of excellence independent of point of view, and leaves open the possibility that any woman who meets the prevailing standards of sophistication can become an honorary man. Precisely because of their intransigent defenses against recognizing the socially constructed nature of mature womanhood, Didion, Dexter, and Trilling belong to the new female literary culture. Like those heroines who pursue sexual liberation as the primrose path to romance and happily-ever-after, these critics espouse an objectively anti-feminist politics anchored in the narrowest personalism. Their most serious failures, and consequently the limitations of their own work, lie in a failure of self-knowledge and of charity — the failure to know that “there but for the grace of God, go I.”

If the new female literary culture has never been unambiguously feminist, it nonetheless wrestles — as the critics of feminism themselves attest — with the problems raised by the women’s movement and by the escalating tensions between the public and private spheres. The collapse of conventional domesticity — and no panicky clinging to empty forms can belie that collapse — challenged female literary culture to make some sense of women’s domestic experience and its legacy. The women’s movement challenged female literary culture to make some sense of women’s relations to the public sphere — through men, on their own, or in alliance with other women. Endings, as orderings of the narrative and signposts to the future, became more and more difficult.

As examples, take Judith Rossner’s *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* and Mary Gordon’s *Final Payments*. Dissimilar in many ways, both novels deal with the theme of female sexual guilt in a Catholic context. For having Terry die under the assault of an unknown man she had picked up

and brought to her apartment, Rossner has been accused of confirming the stereotype of female masochism. Her novel, however, deserves a more nuanced reading: Rossner is not interested in blaming the victim, but in understanding who is responsible for the death of the victim. And, more complex than her critics, she allows for multiple responsibility — including that of the victim. Gordon drags her heroine through the travails of self-disfiguring, body-bloating guilt, but permits her in the end to return to her lover. Both novels evoke the special patriarchalism of Catholic culture, both set forth the deadly and unglamorous effect of real sexual guilt.

Gail Godwin and Margaret Atwood have been especially interested in the woman alone. The lovers and husbands of their heroines clearly play a secondary role, not in the trivialized mode of narcissistic fantasies or underdeveloped characters (to the contrary, these men are finely delineated), but as particular figures among many in the difficult lives of struggling women. Godwin, impressively intelligent and sensitive, has become skilled in embedding her exploration of female imprisonments in plot and incident, rather than in didactic monologues. Socially aware rather than socially committed, she has taken honest work, craft held-true-to as her focus. But she has managed to avoid replaying the male story in female dress, just as she has never dodged the special social and psychological impediments to female work. If *The Odd Woman* explicitly allies itself with Gissing and a late nineteenth-century critical-realist tradition, her *Violet Clay* evokes the legacy of southern femininity — the lady — the malleability of female nature. Her heroines' mothers, fathers, lovers, and friends all fit into the complex tapestry of their social and psychological being. But, as Goodwin herself knows, the model of autonomous individualism is precarious in the modern world. One can sympathize with her commitment — what better model have we than honest work, individual responsibility, and kindness? — and yet wonder how much, without some broader social context, it remains an act of faith.

Atwood is more politically engaged, as she is more adventurous in style and plot. A lively, but refreshingly dry, sense of the absurdity and dark humor of modern life runs through her novels. And her heroines, as in *Surfacing* or *Lady Oracle*, project a disturbing sense that all is not well. Atwood has succeeded in locking her heroines into the distortions of their environment and has presented their attempts to free themselves as radical breaks — having to die in their old lives — rather than smooth transitions. She thus underscores the disjuncture between the world in

which we live and an acceptable ending, even as she underscores women's imprisonment and complicity in the world.

For both Godwin and Atwood, female literary culture represents a complex phenomenon, in which they and their protagonists participate in complex ways. In *Violet Clay* and *Lady Oracle*, respectively, they marvelously bind the economic autonomy of their protagonists to the culture of female fantasy and aspiration, by means of the mass production of Gothic novels. Violet illustrates the covers of Gothics for her living; Joan, of *Lady Oracle*, writes them. The ambiguous theme of the Gothic — the home as source of evil and as refuge, the man as savior and as rapist — provides a counterpoint to their heroines' current attempts to free themselves from that dangerous patriarchal domestic legacy. Violet and Joan thus participate, as producers, in the literary culture that most poignantly embodies the fantasies of women who lack even their tenuous means of escape. As members of a social system, they attempt to build their freedom on exploiting the entrapment of other women. In very different ways, the tactic fails them both. But Godwin's and Atwood's use of the theme attests to their sophistication about the interdependence of "popular" and "high" culture and about the inescapable unity of female literary culture. They understand, in short, that the social condition of all women impinges upon the possibilities open to each and that embracing the false standards of cultural elitism only obscures the common roots of female cultural consciousness in women's common domestic and familial experiences.

Atwood and Godwin do not bring lower-class women directly into their novels, but at least their work openly avows both the continuities in female consciousness across class lines and the class lines that discourage recognizing the continuities. Marge Piercy, in *Small Changes* and *The High Cost of Living*, has turned explicitly to lower-middle-class and even working-class experience. But Piercy, with her rough style and disarming contempt for the amenities, has been explicitly political. Superficially easy to dismiss because of her failures of grace and her didacticism, Piercy has developed an extraordinary generosity beneath her crusty exterior. Her major contribution to female literary culture has been to insist on its necessary inclusiveness and breadth: If you deny one of my sisters, you deny me. And Piercy has dealt forthrightly with women's simply learning to live — as lesbians, as graduate students, as secretaries, as sisters. It is hard to believe that her novels will not ultimately belong as much to social as to literary history, but, by then, she will have played a special cultural role in stretching women's minds and pushing at

the self-imposed limits of mainstream, middle-class female writing. But Piercy, in ruthlessly insisting on the conflict between men and women, has also emphasized the separate, almost secret-society dimension of female literary culture.

I have, perforce, left out more specific voices in this overview than I have included. Neither the inclusions nor the exclusions are intended to reflect the merit of individual writers. Rather, I have sought to sketch the unfolding of female literary culture over the past decade and to indicate some of its major thematic preoccupations. This special focus has, in fact, dictated leaving aside whole provinces of female literary culture: the incredibly rich and disturbing southern tradition which, in the work of Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Eudora Welty, constitutes a very special case; the genteel, discriminating tradition of May Sarton, Maureen Howard, Paula Fox, and so many more; the strong individualist tradition of Mary McCarthy and Lillian Hellman; the dynamic and compelling black tradition taking shape in the work of Nicky Giovanni, Maya Angelou, and Toni Morrison; not to mention the poets. All of these traditions are integral to our female literary culture, yet none of them alone, however strong, provides its distinctive public cast.

For the general character of our female literary culture has been shaped by its roots in the white, middle-class, domestic, female tradition. The limits of that tradition have been sorely tried in the collective and individual attempts to come to terms with the women's movement and the social relations that engendered it. Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* may best exemplify the strength and weakness of the new feminist domestic fiction that has taken shape over the past decade. In the story of Mira, French touches all the established bases. Beginning with mother in particular, and parental and social attitudes towards girls in general, French unambiguously portrays Mira's early marriage as a desperate attempt to protect herself from gang rape. Only as a married lady can Mira hope for some access to the public space, hope simply not to be brutalized by random men. Developing themes implicit in Piercy, French then offers an acute portrayal of domestic, suburban life among the lower middle class in the consumer society of the fifties. Mira's husband's success as a doctor moves her on to a better neighborhood, with-

out freeing her from her gnawing — if unformulated — dissatisfactions as a woman. She spends a lot of time keeping house meticulously, compulsively. Just as she is trying to mold her life into a renewed commitment, to experience it in terms of romantic love for her husband, he announces that he is leaving her for another woman.

The second part of the book traces Mira's return to graduate school, awakening to feminism, friendships with other women, and rediscovery of her children. But her one passionate affair convinces her that even the best men, the men one loves, are the enemy. And to provide social confirmation of her private conviction, the daughter of her closest friend is brutally raped. The public space is no more safe for women than it was when Mira herself was an adolescent. The sixties have come and gone, leaving the violence of decaying patriarchy untamed. Mira's friend determines that women must cultivate toughness and band together. Mira takes a teaching job in Maine and walks alone on the beach.

The brilliant marketing of French's book has assured it a wide distribution. And it is my impression that it is being widely read, not just by the female intelligentsia or the active feminists, but by the same women who buy Gothics at supermarket checkout counters. And they are saying, "Oh, yeah!" But *The Women's Room* remains faithful to the middle-class (the all-American) tradition in eschewing any discussion of the political and social context of women's oppression. Because French refuses to situate decaying domesticity in the social relations of production and reproduction, she ends on as personal a note as the least feminist of the liberationists. She falls into the confessional mode rather than providing a genuine *Bildungsroman*.

In this respect, French, her fine feminist commitments to the contrary notwithstanding, comes perilously close to the mindless, glossy *Looking for Work* that Sarah Cheever has just given us. Cheever has the stylistic control and cheek of the trendiest New York magazines. And, leaning towards the surface brilliance and plush familiarity of high-budget films (one thinks of *An Unmarried Woman*), she paints the cheery saga of a spoiled, upper-middle-class brat who marries the wrong guy (no class, ethnic, or major psychological complications here, just the first guy you marry on your way into the world), has an affair, and finally gets ready for a steady job — which, of course, she finds. There is no indication that the "work" of the title is to be taken with the seriousness a Gail Godwin takes it. Cheever's heroine goes to *Newsweek* to work on the intellectual assembly line. But she mingles with the right people (whom, because of her parents, she knew or could have known all along) and

goes to a lot of nifty parties. She has simply learned that she no longer requires a man to foot the bills. Class does have its advantages.

Looking for Work may provide an ominously correct sign of where our female literary culture is going. (Didion may not find Cheever profound, but would never accuse her of shrillness.) But we have to turn to Alix Kates Shulman's *Burning Questions* to discover where it might go. As *Bildungsroman*, not confession, *Burning Questions* essentially reworks *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* in the light of the women's movement and a developing female literary culture. For Shulman is asking what feminism teaches us, what it means to us, how it lives in women's lives. At the same time, she is trying to find a new heritage for female literary culture by wedding the American domestic tradition to a female revolutionary tradition. And to do so, she is grappling with stylistic innovation and control, with the interplay between the subjective and the objective voice. Touching upon radical rage, lesbian sex, the joys and constraints of childrearing, the disintegration of marriages, Shulman ends by granting her heroine a possible — if not perfect — life, including the loving of a man, work, and good fellowship with women. But the happy resolution is not taken to mean that all's right with the world. Rather, it affords a foundation, the personal strength, for struggling on together. But then Shulman appears to understand that the personal story — for all its idiosyncrasy of detail — is just a special case of the general female story, which itself is indissolubly linked to the culture and society at large.

Paradoxically, both the strength and the weakness of female literary culture have resulted from the leveling experience of sexism. Women, having shared so many disabilities and having been confined in the domestic space, have been able to share a literary culture that hovers on the borderline between "popular" and "high." The revolutionary upheaval of the women's movement — articulating as it did the unprecedented participation of women in the public space, especially the labor force — prompted a searching reconsideration of women's objective social assignments and the subjective consciousness that appeared to anchor the complicity of women in their reproduction. The dominant themes of female literary culture — female consciousness as shaped by the domestic legacy, female reproductive power, female subordination at home and in the world — run through a range of works otherwise differentiated by genre, style, and seriousness. These same themes, to be sure, make their way into the dominant male literary culture — but objectified, as that from which to escape. This objectification has tended to merge

female voices, to the extent that they speak as self-consciously female. It has also tended to deny them serious critical attention. Finally, it has precluded their acceptance, on their own terms, within the dominant culture. Hostile male and female critics talk about failures of complexity and sophistication — Joan Didion's "exploration of moral complexities and ambiguities" — never questioning whether self-centered and self-serving male accounts of the prevailing sexual strife meet their hallowed criteria.

The new female literary culture increasingly faces internal divisions. Liberationist confessions and complacent individual successes may erode the force of the most profound questions about the nature of women and their proper place in our society and culture. But those questions — formulated in the female voice — reach towards the dark center of our collective life: they address men as well as women — and women of all social groups. Women, as a group, remain our most sensitive witnesses to the debilitating and contradictory effects of bondage. And the power of their knowledge derives from their recognition of a collective female experience. Even as the dominant culture testifies to the social crisis of our individualist heritage, individual women get drawn into the lures of a chimerical individual success or personal opting-out. But the cogency of female literary culture as a whole lies in the multiplicity of its voices and its insistence upon the collective foundation of individual consciousness. Taken on these terms, rather than on the terms of the individual talent, female literary culture can be recognized as an essential — if normally denied — half of our dominant culture. Allowing female literary culture as a whole its rightful place in our cultural life is to acknowledge the missing voice, to open the discussion to both parties, to regain the vibrancy of a culture that courageously articulates the complexities — yes, conflicts and tragedies — of any life in society.

The Fifth Decade
1981 – 1990



SHOOTING WHALES

by Mark Strand

for Judith and Leon Major

When the shoals of plankton
swarmed into St. Margaret's Bay,
turning the beaches pink,
we saw from our place on the hill
the sperm whales feeding,
fouling the nets
in their play,
and breaching clean
so the humps of their backs
rose over the wide sea meadows.

Day after day
we waited inside
for the rotting plankton to disappear.
The smell stilled even the wind,
and the oxen looked stunned,
pulling hay on the slope
of our hill.
But the plankton kept coming in
and the whales would not go.

That's when the shooting began.
The fishermen got in their boats
and went after the whales,
and my father and uncle
and we children went, too.
The froth of our wake sank fast
in the wind-shaken water.

The whales surfaced close by.
Their foreheads were huge,
the doors of their faces were closed.
Before sounding, they lifted
their flukes into the air
and brought them down hard.
They beat the sea into foam,
and the path that they made
shone after them.

Though I did not see their eyes,
I imagined they were
like the eyes of mourning,
glazed with rheum,
watching us, sweeping along
under the darkening sheets of salt.

When we cut our engine and waited
for the whales to surface again,
the sun was setting,
turning the rock-strewn barrens a gaudy salmon.
A cold wind flailed at our skin.
When finally the sun went down
and it seemed like the whales had gone,
my uncle, no longer afraid,
shot aimlessly into the sky.

Three miles out
in the rolling dark
under the moon's astonished eyes,
our engine would not start
and we headed home in the dinghy.
And my father, hunched over the oars,
brought us in. I watched him,
rapt in his effort, rowing against the tide,
his blond hair glistening with salt.
I saw the slick spillage of moonlight
being blown over his shoulders,
and the sea and spindrift
suddenly silver.

He did not speak the entire way.
at midnight
when I went to bed,
I imagined the whales
moving beneath me,
sliding over the weed-covered hills of the deep;
they knew where I was;
they were luring me
downward and downward
into the murmurous
waters of sleep.

Volume 39, Number 1 Winter 1981

Mark Strand was the U.S. Poet Laureate in 1990–91. This poem (© the *New Yorker*) is one of two that appeared in this issue. Others have appeared in summer 1961, summer 1963, spring 1984, and winter 1991, as well as translations of poems by de Andrade (summer 1976). "Conversations with Mark Strand" appeared in winter and spring 1981.

The Persistence of Diversity

BY ANDREW M. GREELEY

Volume 39, Number 2 Spring 1981

Andrew M. Greeley also had an essay in the fall 1971 issue. He has taught sociology at the University of Arizona, and is the author of a number of popular novels.

My article "The Rediscovering of Diversity," which appeared in the *Antioch Review* ten years ago, described the beginning of serious research on the phenomenon of ethnic diversity in the United States. The first step in the rediscovery of diversity was unquestionably the enormously successful *Beyond the Melting Pot* by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the early 1960s. By the end of the sixties, American intellectuals began to manifest tentative interests in the so-called blue-collar white ethnics, in part because it was feared that these people were "obstacles to social progress" or "a potential racist backlash." It was relatively easy to establish early in a discussion that the white ethnics were no longer disproportionately blue collar and were no more likely to be racists than other Americans (in the case of the Irish and Italian ethnics, somewhat less likely to be opposed to racial integration). Not all the elites were reassured and Michael Novak's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* contributed to their uneasiness, for Novak reinforced their stereotype of the angry and frustrated "white ethnic hardhats" ready to take to the streets in anger over their being odd man out in American society.

The reaction was quick in coming. Orlando Patterson weighed in quickly with an attack not merely on the white ethnic, but on the legitimacy of studying ethnic diversity. Novak, as a self-anointed spokesperson for the ethnics as well as a student of them, was the perfect target for the anti-ethnic reaction. Fortunately, while Novak and Patterson received much of the public's attention, neither of them was encumbered by the slightest taint of empirical evidence. In the meantime, a whole new generation of scholars arose — many of them from ethnic backgrounds — who paid no attention to this ideological controversy and contented themselves rather with serious and careful study of the persistence of diversity in American life.

Articles, monographs, and textbooks have appeared in large numbers (and even a rather sleazy and exploitative Harvard "Encyclopedia" of ethnic groups), and while the research on ethnic diversity is still frowned upon in some fashionable places (the *American Sociological Review* has published an article refuting the persistence of ethnicity in American life, but no article describing that persistence!), it is still fair to say that the rediscovery of ethnic and religio-ethnic diversity in American life was one of the most fascinating social-science breakthroughs of the 1970s, a decade in which the achievements of social-science scholarship were not exactly distinguished. It seems reasonable to categorize our new knowledge of ethnic diversity under four headings: (1) the economic success of the ethnic immigrant, (2) the persistence of ethnic diversity, (3) the compatibility of diversity and economic success, and (4) new models of American ethnicity.

The Success of the Immigrants

W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in their *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* surveyed what they thought was the cultural wasteland of "Polonia" — the Polish-American region on the near-northwest side of Chicago around Milwaukee Avenue and Division Street — in the beginning of the 1920s and saw little hope that the second or third generation of Polish-Americans would become successful members of the new society. More moderate than the Immigration Commission, which had provided the intellectual support for the restrictive immigration law, Thomas and Znaniecki did not argue that Polish-Americans were racially inferior, genetically unstable, and hence unqualified for success in America. According to Thomas and Znaniecki, the inferiority of the Polish peasant was cultural. The attitudes and the values, the "charac-

ter" of the immigrant, were unsuited for modern American urban life. The Polish immigrant was still a peasant with a peasant's attitudes, values, and character, and the "social disorganization" of the Polish-American community was the result of incompatibility of peasant values with the values demanded of urban industrial society. The Polish-Americans lacked the culture, the personality, and the social skills to achieve in America, unless and until the peasant could leave behind his "Polishness" and adopt the values, attitudes, and behavior patterns of the host culture. Thomas and Znaniecki recommended that Americans facilitate this change by helping the Poles to overcome their "social disorganization" and make progress towards a thorough Americanization. Thomas, however, was not very optimistic about this happening.

By the 1960s the average Polish-American family income was above the national average — even above that for white Americans living in large cities in the North. Indeed, all eastern and southern European immigrant groups had achieved at least parity in occupation, income, and education in the United States; and the Irish, who came a generation earlier, had become the most affluent gentile ethnic group in America. At first little attention was paid to these statistics. The stereotype of the blue-collar ethnic persisted. Then Barry Chiswick, of the University of Illinois, began to publish his immigration research based on the 1970 Census, showing that it took an immigrant about thirteen years in America to equal the income of those who had the same educational background in a native society as he did, and that the sons of immigrants may earn 7 percent more in annual income than the sons of native-born Americans. The only exceptions in Chiswick's analysis were Hispanic immigrants, who still are at a considerable disadvantage in the race for economic success. Chiswick's colleague, Francine Blau, more recently reanalyzing the data from the National Immigration Commission, found very similar dynamics were at work at the turn of the century. At that time it was the eastern and southern European immigrants who occupied the place that the Hispanic immigrants occupy at the present.

Gradually during the 1970s, informed opinion about ethnic immigrants shifted. At the beginning of the decade, National Opinion Research Center research showing that the Poles and Italians and Irish had become enormously successful in America was rejected out of hand as being counterintuitive. Now the economic success of the ethnic immigrants is dismissed as something that everybody already knows and hence of trivial importance (sometimes you can't win!). However, little attention has been paid to the fundamental question of why the predic-

tions of both the Immigration Commission racists and the cultural pessimists like Thomas and Znaniecki were wrong. The issue is not without importance in contemporary America, for predictions of the impossibility of assimilation are now being made by neo-nativists about the Hispanic immigrants of the present, just as they were made about the southern European immigrants eighty years ago. Just as it was said then that the Poles and the Italians could not be assimilated, so it is now being said that Hispanics cannot be assimilated, and those who make the prediction seem quite unconscious of the parallel between the old “rejected refuse of the earth” and the new, nor do they seem to be aware of saying the same thing about the Mexican peon that W.I. Thomas said about the Polish peasant (although usually with considerably less intellectual and moral generosity).

Whatever the implications of ethnic immigrant success and whatever the intellectual disharmony of those who once talked about blue-collar ethnics and who now pretend the success of the ethnics has been known all along, the fact remains that the Polish and Italian peasants and their children and grandchildren have, in fact, succeeded. Economically, at any rate, “they” have become like “us.”

The Persistence of Ethnicity

At the time the 1970 article was written, my colleagues and I were beginning to grope for a distinction that we have described since then as “conscious” and “unconscious.” The former is ethnic identification — the propensity of a person to identify by words and actions with a particular ethnic heritage. The latter is the survival of ethnic subcultural residues within the larger American society. Interestingly enough, in all our research of the 1970s we could find almost no correlation between these two phenomena. One could, for example, engage in Irish alcohol use and political behavior patterns and participate in characteristic Irish family structure with very little if any Irish self-definition or self-consciousness. What’s more, there was no correlation between the degree of one’s Irish self-consciousness, for example, and the persistence of subcultural residual traits. An Irish-American might engage in very Irish political, drinking, and familial behavior (conceivably all at the same time!) and not be tied into Irish ethnic activities, think of himself as particularly Irish, or even realize that his behavioral traits were rooted in Irish origins. Our evidence showed that during the 1970s there was an increase in the propensity of Americans to identify with ethnic groups (high-school stu-

dents wrote term papers on family history — indeed, students in the public high schools, which a generation earlier were expected to eliminate all traces of diversity and make good Americans of the children of immigrants) and no particular evidence that the residual ethnic subculture was disappearing in American society. The Irish were political activists, heavy drinkers, and given to authoritarian and non-affectionate family style. The Italians were low political participants, high drinkers (but without drinking problems), and the products of an authoritarian but affectionate family style. And the Jews were political activists, drank very little, and, in the present generation, have democratic and affectionate family style. Jewish world views tend to be pessimistic, Italian tend to be fatalistic, and Irish tend to be hopeful. Jews and Italians are oriented especially towards their parents, the Irish towards their siblings. Jews and Italians still tend to invest their education in income achievement, while the Irish, like most other Americans, invest theirs in occupational status. The Irish still over-choose political or politically related jobs (law and political science), the Jews over-choose the professions, and the Italians over-choose large corporate organizations. When faced with a political problem, Jews tend to form organizations, Italians tend to make personal contacts with political influentials (who are often also relatives or connections), and the Irish engage in both kinds of activities.

Furthermore, none of these distinctive behavior patterns is affected by the generation one's family has been in America, educational attainment, ethnic self-consciousness, or the proportion of fellow ethnics in the same neighborhood. Indeed, some of the subcultural traits seem to survive even ethnic exogamy. The marginal increment in drinking behavior that comes from the second Irish parent is quite small, as is the marginal increment in Jewish nondrinking behavior from a second Jewish parent. One ethnic parent, in other words, is enough to transmit the drinking subculture (our research provides only three cases of Irish-Jewish intermarriage, so we cannot judge which group would "successfully" transmit its drinking subculture in such situations — presumably the Irish would win in this case, however, since their drinking patterns are more like those of the American norm).

Our evidence indicates that these ethnic patterns are transmitted in the early socialization experience by parents, family, friends, and neighbors. Young Italian-Americans visit their parents every week, not because they think this is an "Italian" way to behave, but simply because it is the only way that they know, and they are often astonished when they go to college to find that children from other subcultures do not do the

same things. Similarly, young Irish-Americans take it for granted that one offers a drink to a visitor, not because they are self-consciously Irish (necessarily), but because this is a behavior pattern to which they have been exposed in childhood, both in their own homes and in the homes of their parents' friends and relatives. Precisely because little if any self-consciousness about ethnic heritage is required and because behavior patterns are intimate and interpersonal, the core of ethnic residue becomes remarkably durable. No one, for example, doubts the persistence of a black subculture or of a Jewish subculture across generations. Why then should there be any particular surprise about the durability of other ethnic subcultures?

My colleague, William McCready, has demonstrated that one can fashion hypotheses about American ethnic groups based on the ethnography done on the present society in the land of origin and have these hypotheses sustained when they are applied to American ethnic groups. Indeed, one could even fashion a series of hypotheses from what we know of Celtic antiquity about world view, family structure, drinking behavior, the role of women in the society, and political style and have these hypotheses sustained from data about the contemporary American-Irish. The easy assumption that a generation of the public high school and the mass media would wipe out such cultural practices begins to look more and more frivolous. Indeed, one begins to wonder why we ever suspected that such institutions of socialization as the school and the TV screen would be more important than the family dinner table.

To say that the various groups are different from one another is not to say that they are totally different. They share allegiance to the American political system, speak the same language, work in the same economy, and share the same core values of American society. Furthermore, they are products for the most part of the same European cultural heritage. Ethnic diversity does not mean that the members of the various groups are as different as though they were from different planets. The conception of such critics of the ethnic revival as Norman Podoretz, that ethnicity is a threat to the common culture, seems unjustified both because the common culture has not been notably affected by the ethnic diversity that it has managed to tolerate for a century and more, and because the common culture, in fact, legitimates different ways of participating in the common culture. Whatever may be said of midtown Manhattan elites, the American cultural consensus takes it for granted that Americans are free to be anything they want so long as they are Americans too, so long as they accept, that is, the fundamental political principles on which the

society is based (a principle that was already established in the early immigration laws).

How different are the ethnic groups from one another? Surely they are not as different as their ancestors were when they lived in different countries and spoke different languages. They work together, they go to school together, they belong to the same political parties, and they attend similar if not the same churches. The diversity that has persisted is a diversity that coexists with similarity. Obviously the similarities are much greater than the diversities. Our data do not permit us to say how the components of similarity and diversity are changing among American ethnic groups. All we can say at the present time is that the variables we have studied for contemporary ethnics show remarkably little evidence of declining diversity. Perhaps in the very earliest phases of immigrant acculturation, those characteristics that are either easiest to shed (athletic preferences, for example) or most essential to give up (foreign language as a first language — or so it seemed to the Irish at any rate, many of whom actually immigrated to this country with Irish as their first language) are relinquished. Residual cultural characteristics transmitted in the childhood experience within the family or local neighborhood context remain remarkably durable — precisely because there is little pressure to *eliminate these characteristics*.

Diversity and Success

My colleagues and I have come to believe that immigrant groups will rather quickly relinquish ethnic characteristics that are an obstacle to American achievement. We also believe, however, that success in America is possible despite the persistence of subcultural characteristics that have been considered an obstacle to that success. Sometimes a group achieves despite its disadvantages. At other times the disadvantage turns out not to be a disadvantage, and at still other times it may be that a subcultural trait that is thought to impede success actually facilitates it. Thus, it was cheerfully predicted in the nineteenth century that the Irish problem with “the drink” would prevent them from ever truly becoming successful Americans, and even in the 1950s and early 1960s such writers as William Shannon lamented the absence of Irish success in America (a lament that was notably unsupported by solid empirical evidence) because of the drink and the “lower middle class respectability” and an inclination of the most gifted young men to become priests. It was

certainly true that many gifted young Irish went into the clergy and the religious life (so did some incompetents, so far as that goes, and not a few mediocrities), and it is also true that there is a negative relationship between economic success and excessive drinking among the Irish. Nonetheless, the Irish are still, in terms of annual income, the most affluent gentile ethnic group in America. They would be even more successful if they didn't drink as much as they do, but their failings for the "creature" did not make them "also-rans" in the quest for affluence in American society.

Similarly, geographic mobility, or at least the willingness to be geographically mobile, seems to correlate with achievement for most Americans, but it does not correlate with achievement for Catholics, who are much less likely to want to leave behind neighborhood and hometown to improve their economic condition. The correlation between willingness to move about and achievement simply does not exist among Catholics, for whom it seems to be an irrelevant factor, neither facilitating nor impeding success.

Finally, the peasant frugality of the Poles — their reluctance to take economic risks — which W.I. Thomas thought would be one of the obstacles to their achievement in America may, in fact, have turned out to be the functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic and facilitated their success. In the first decade of this century, as Victor Greene has demonstrated, a sixth of the money in Chicago savings and loan institutions was in Polish-owned institutions; similarly, the Polish propensity to sink their money into land as soon as they could may have turned out to be either a very wise or very lucky assessment of trends in the American economy.

There now seems to be ample reason to doubt that anything near total cultural assimilation is required in order to succeed in America. One again wonders why anyone thought that it would. Jews are the most successful ethnic group in America (and when one asserts that fact, one is likely to get a number of angry letters from irate readers, accusing one of stirring up anti-Semitism), and yet no one suggests that American Jews have become indistinguishable from Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Perhaps the mistake of those who expected that a total assimilation would be needed to achieve in America was to think that only a few groups (most notably from the eastern Mediterranean) had subcultural resources that would be powerful assets in American life.

It is therefore possible to develop five models about the persistence of ethnic diversity in American society, four of which take into account the two decisive facts that current research has established about American

ethnicity: the ethnics have become successful and yet remain to some extent different from one another.

The enclave model: Some groups continue to have distinctive enclaves within the larger culture, most notably separatist religious groups in agricultural settings. These communities maintain relatively impermeable boundaries and contain both their primary (family and friendship) and secondary (occupational and economic) relationships within the boundaries of the community. It may be that W.I. Thomas would have expected something like a Polish-American enclave to develop a more or less permanent culture of poverty, although surely even under such circumstances the Polish-Americans would have been part of American economic life, presumably at a permanently low level. This model, however, does not seem to be pertinent for any of the major American immigrant groups. The economic achievement of late-nineteenth-century eastern and southern European immigrant groups makes the model irrelevant in a discussion of their present status in American life.

The assimilation model: At the other end of the continuum is the assimilationist explanation of the success of the immigrant groups. "They" may earn as much money as "we" do because "they" have become thoroughly like "us." The common school, the mass media, the power of thought patterns structured into the English language, and Americans' consumer-oriented economy have made the children and the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of the ethnic immigrants indistinguishable from native-born Americans. The melting pot has melted after all, or is at least well on its way to accomplishing its melting process. Men like W.I. Thomas were wrong in their predictions about the Polish-Americans, for example, because they underestimated the assimilating power of American culture.

It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that in the beginning of the 1970s this would have been the preferred model for most American scholars who bothered to think about ethnicity, immigration, and achievement. They might not have thought that the assimilation process was complete, but they would have argued, I suspect, that economic success was the result of previous assimilation and a guarantee that more would occur. After the research that has been done in the last decade, it does not seem possible to contend that the melting pot has done its work. Diversity was not only rediscovered during the last decade, but it was also rediscovered to persist and to be durable despite the impact of the forces that were supposed to cause its elimination.

The “acculturation-but-not-assimilation” model: Professor Milton Gordon some time ago invented an alternative to the simple melting pot. These ethnics, he suggested, were acculturating; that is to say, they were embracing the values of the host culture and in their secondary relationships becoming integrated into the host society, economy, and politics. Nevertheless, in their interpersonal relationships, friendships, and especially marriage, they tended to salvage some of the old primary-group values and to choose their preferred role opposites from within the ethnic collectivity. Such a model seemed to fit especially American Jews but was applicable to other ethnic groups. On the one hand there was the general economic assimilation and success, on the other hand a self-consciousness of kind and some kind of boundaries, though certainly not impermeable, to the collectivity. In Professor Gordon’s view, there would perhaps ultimately be assimilation too, but the process would be long delayed by the acculturation, but not assimilation, way station.

Gordon’s model fits much of the data, though intermarriage rates among the nongentile ethnic groups seem to be higher than his perspective would lead us to expect, and, more importantly, so does the survival of residual subcultural traits, which are not without their impact on the secondary group dimensions of human life.

The stewpot model: the persistence of subcultural residues has led to the elaboration of again another model, dubbed by Virgil Elizondo “the stewpot” (in a stewpot the various ingredients maintain their own distinctiveness, although they are affected through molecular transfer by the flavor of the other ingredients — Father Elizondo has generously offered to let the Irish play the part of the potatoes in his stew). In this model the ethnics have achieved in American life and yet managed to maintain certain aspects of their cultural diversity, because such traits have not been a liability in their struggle for achievement — or at least not as much a liability as those who viewed them with dismay three-quarters of a century ago believed. The Irish were successful despite their drinking problem. The Poles were successful despite the temporary instability of family life that W.I. Thomas described. The Italians and the Poles were successful despite their relative geographic immobility in comparison with other groups. The ethnic group traits survive because there is no reason for them not to survive. They do not impede success in America and are passed on from generation to generation, perhaps unself-consciously, simply out of their inertial force. “They” have not become like “us” because “they” have not had to become completely like “us” to achieve.

The ethnic resource model: Finally, it is possible that some sub-cultural traits are not an impediment to success at all, but an asset. The Jewish proclivity for the professions, for example, and the Irish proclivity for politics represent resources in their respective heritages that were a strong positive resource for these two collectivities; so, too, might be the strong family ties of the Poles and the Italians, which, while they may impede geographic mobility, provide alternative resources in family and community support that are distinct assets to economic achievement. "They" didn't become like "us" not only because "they" didn't have to. Being different from "us" actually facilitated their success in American life.

One of the principal research questions still on a future agenda must be a choice among the last three models, or more likely a determination of how much utility there is in each of the three. The real world of American ethnic diversity is likely to involve a complex combination of "acculturation," "stewpot," and "ethnic resource." We do not know exactly how much of its cultural heritage an ethnic group has to give up to be successful in American life. Indeed, we cannot even say for sure whether it is necessary for the collectivity to abandon its own distinctive language (despite the virulent antipathy even among some liberals and leftists to Hispanic bilingualism). German-Americans until 1916, for example, were quite successful in American life yet managed to maintain a considerable amount of linguistic differentiation. One must certainly be able to speak English well to succeed in America, but the performance of immigrants in Chiswick's research suggests that it is by no means necessary, if one has the educational qualifications, to speak English without an accent.

We do indeed know that diversity is compatible with achievement and that many ethnic characteristics can be maintained (perhaps not altogether intentionally) without being a barrier to economic success. We do not yet know, however, precisely how much "they" must become like "us" in order for them to make as much as we do. It is certain that "they" don't have to become as much like "us" as W.I. Thomas thought they would or even as many Americans had assumed up to 1970.

Frequently our discussion of the success of the immigrant is marked by the charge that the immigrants have succeeded because they are standing on the prostrate body of blacks and Hispanics who followed them into the great American cities. I know from experience that once this charge is raised, it cannot be refuted. In most conversations, the charge of white ethnic racism, once made, dominates all further discus-

sion. However, there is no substance to the challenge and it is easy to respond to, although the one who makes such a charge normally does not want a response. If the achievement of the ethnics can be attributed to the oppression of blacks and Hispanics, then it might very well explain that the ethnics have moved up one rung in the economic ladder. The blacks and Hispanics are now on the bottom rung, the eastern and southern European immigrants are one rung above them, and perhaps the Irish are yet another rung above. If such an explanation were valid, it would simply mean the whole white superstructure had moved up a notch and that all would have improved their position over the blacks, but that the ethnics would not have improved their relative position vis-à-vis any of the other groups. However, in fact, the phenomenon of achievement is not merely a phenomenon of absolute increase, but also of relative increase. One cannot account for the relative improvement of the ethnics' economic condition by attributing it to the oppression of nonwhites. The economic fallacies in this charge are easy to establish and therefore one is discouraged to find it not merely in popular usage, but also in reviews in academic journals and from scholarly funding agencies.

Aspects of American Diversity

Whichever model one chooses as the most useful to understanding the persistence of diversity, two critical facts must be kept in mind about how the larger culture views ethnic differences.

First, ethnicity is an option, not an obligation. American society has always been moderately tolerant of diversity, either intensely pluralistic or at least willing to make the best out of a bad thing. If you want to be "into" Jewishness, or Irishness, or blackness, or Polishness, or Germanness, most Americans figure that is your business so long as it doesn't detract from any commitment to the fundamental political values of the society and to the principle of fair play for other groups (Americans, for example, are genuinely appalled to find out that French Canadians expect biculturalism for themselves but assimilation for the post-World War II immigrants from eastern and southern Europe to Canada). However, our cultural consensus does not accept the notion of compulsory ethnicity; that is to say, the forced identification of an individual either by society and its law or by group pressure with an ethnic collectivity. The various racial and linguistic quotas imposed by the federal courts and bureaucracies during the 1970s are overwhelmingly disapproved by Americans, including the majority of those groups supposed to benefit

from such quotas. Compulsory ethnic identification is utterly foreign to the American tradition and is unlikely to be successful unless there is a drastic change in the cultural consensus of the nation, a change that does not seem imminent.

The national consensus assumes that a person may reject identification altogether, make such identification part of the core of his self-definition, or steer a middle ground. The point is that both the identification and the modality of the identification are matters of free choice, subject to change at the will or the whim of the identifier. The courts and the federal bureaucracy have overridden this consensus, but it yet remains to be seen how successful they will be.

Second, American ethnic-group boundaries are permeable. One can move in or out of the collectivity without anyone either in the group or outside the group denying the right to so move. Much of the struggle for racial integration can be seen as an effort by blacks to take to themselves this ethnic-group right — the right to be invisible if one chooses. The permeability of boundaries facilitates ethnic group choice for those with mixed ethnic backgrounds. It is generally assumed by those who write of ethnic intermarriage as though it represents the end of ethnicity in the United States, that the offspring of such marriages identify with neither their mother's nor their father's group. In fact, however, most such offspring do indeed choose one or the other group as their primary identification, usually the group of the father because they bear his ethnic name (although Italian-American mothers seem often, according to our data, to be able to win identification to their ethnic group among children of ethnic exogamous marriages). Moreover, many of those with mixed ethnic backgrounds celebrate the fact that they can choose from heritages of identification to suit the circumstances, being (quite legitimately) Irish when you are with your wife's family but Native American with affirmative-action officers.

A good way to understand the culture of this nation is to look at its public rituals; and one may understand much about American ethnic diversity by examining the rituals of such diversity as celebrated on the "national" day of an ethnic group — St. Patrick's Day for the Irish, Constitution Day for the Poles, Columbus Day for Italians, the Feast of San Juan Batista for the Puerto Ricans, Our Lady of Guadalupe for Mexicans, Bud Billikin Day for blacks, St. Casimir Day for Lithuanians. Such feasts, it should be noted carefully, are not exclusivist. On the contrary, instead of the barriers becoming temporarily impermeable on that day, they collapse completely. Everyone else is invited, for the day at any rate,

to identify with the particular ethnic group that is celebrating. Everyone is Irish on St. Patrick's Day, Italian on Columbus Day, black on Bud Billikin Day, Mexican-American on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. As evidence of this, the civic and religious dignitaries of the towns don the colors of whatever nationality is celebrating and march in their parade as temporary members of the ethnic groups. And, of course, the same bands march in all the parades. Thus, the Polish Drum and Bugle Corps would be Italian on Columbus Day, Puerto Rican on the Feast of San Juan Batista, black on Bud Billikin Day, and, of course, Irish on St. Patrick's Day — and they will assume such temporary ethnic identification not reluctantly or sheepishly, but happily, arguing that such identification is "what America is all about." The research evidence seems to suggest that they are right.

A tremendous amount of progress has been made in the last decade in the study of American diversity. Three journals, now all with high rejection rates, present a continuing flow of serious and high-quality articles on the phenomenon of ethnic diversity, and courses on the subject have become a routine part of college and even graduate school curricula. Nativism and neo-nativism have by no means given up. Except for the Ford Foundation, prestigious foundations will not fund research on ethnic diversity and few prestigious journals will carry articles on it. The neo-nativist organizations — many of them curious relics of the 1960s Left radicalism — have become militantly anti-immigrant and especially anti-Hispanic. Yet the progress towards understanding and legitimation since 1970 has been astonishing. Periodic announcements that the "ethnic revival" is over have proven unfounded. It has now become reasonably legitimate to study American ethnic diversity and reasonably clear that such diversity will be around for further study well into the next millenium.

THOUGH HIS NAME IS INFINITE, MY FATHER IS ASLEEP

by Larry Levis

When my father disappeared,
He did not go into hiding.
In old age, he was infinite,
So where could he hide? No,
He went into his name,
He went into his name, & into
The way two words keep house,
Each syllable swept clean
Again when you say them;
That's how my father left,
And that's how my father went
Out of his house, forever.
Imagine a house without words,
The family speechless for once
At the kitchen table, & all night
A hard wind ruining
The mottled skin of plums
In the orchard, & no one
Lifting a finger to stop it.
But imagine no word for "house,"
Or wind in a bare place always,
And soon it will all disappear —
Brick, & stone, & wood — all three
Are wind when you can't say
"House," & know, anymore, what it is.
Say Father, then, to no one,
Or say my father was, himself,
A house, or say each word's a house,
Some lit, & some abandoned.

Then go one step further,
And say a name is a home,
As remote & as intimate.
Say *home*, then, or say, "I'll
Never go home again," or say,
Years later, with a baffled,
Ironical smile, "I'm on my way
Home," or say, as he did,
"I'm going into my name."
Go further; take a chance, & say
A name is infinite. Repeat all
The names you know, all
The names you've ever heard,
The living & the dead, the precise,
Light snow of their syllables.
Say your own name, or say
A last name, say mine, say *Levis*,
Say a name so old & frayed
By common use it's lost
All meaning now, & sounds
Like a house being swept out,
Like wind where there's no house.
Say finally there is no way
To document this, or describe
The passing of a father, that
Faint scent of time, or how
He swore delicately, quickly
Against it without ever appearing
To hurry the ceremony of swearing,

And say, too, how you disliked
 And loved him, how he stays up
 All night now in two words,
 How his worn-out, infinite name
 Outwits death when you say it.
 And say finally how the things
 He had to do for you
 Humiliated him until
 He could not get his breath, & say
 How much they mattered, how
 Necessary he was. And then,
 Before sleep, admit, also,
 That his name is nothing,
 Light as three syllables,
 Lighter than Pain or Art, lighter
 Than History, & tell how two words
 That mean nothing to anyone
 Else, once meant a world
 To you; how someday, even you,
 In the sweep of those syllables —
 Wind, crushed bones, & ashes —
 Begin to live again.

Volume 40, Number 3 Summer 1982

Larry Levis had five other poems in this issue. He contributed an article on Zbigniew Herbert in winter 1987 and a short story in summer 1990. He directs the program in creative writing at the University of Utah.

The Compartment

BY RAYMOND CARVER

Volume 41, Number 2 Spring 1983

Raymond Carver also had a poem in the summer 1978 issue. He died in 1988.

Myers was traveling through France in a first-class rail car on his way to Strasbourg to visit his son, who was a student at the university there. He hadn't seen the boy in eight years. There had been no phone calls between them during this time, not even a postcard since Myers and the boy's mother had gone their separate ways — the boy staying with her. The final breakup was hastened along, Myers always believed, by the boy's malign interference in their personal affairs.

The last time Myers had seen his son, the boy had lunged for him during a violent quarrel. Myers's wife had been standing by the sideboard, dropping one dish of china after the other onto the dining room floor. Then she'd gone on to the cups. "That's enough," Myers had said, and at that instant the boy charged him. Myers sidestepped and got him in a headlock while the boy wept and pummeled Myers on the back and kidneys. Myers had him, and while he had him he made the most of it. He slammed him into the wall and threatened to kill him. He meant it. "I gave you life," Myers remembered himself shouting, "and I can take it back!"

Thinking about that horrible scene now, Myers shook his head as if it had happened to someone else. And it had. He was simply not that same person. These days he lived alone and had little to do with anybody outside of his work. At night he listened to classical music and read books on waterfowl decoys.

He lit a cigarette and continued to gaze out the train window, ignoring the man who sat in the seat next to the door and who slept with a hat pulled over his eyes. It was early in the morning and mist hung over the green fields that passed by outside. Now and then Myers saw a farm house and its outbuildings, everything surrounded by a wall. He thought this might be a good way to live — in an old house surrounded by a wall.

It was just past six o'clock. Myers hadn't slept since he'd boarded the train in Milan at eleven the night before. When the train had left Milan, he'd considered himself lucky to have the compartment to himself. He kept the light on and looked at guidebooks. He read things he wished he'd read before he'd been to the place they were about. He discovered much that he should have seen and done. In a way, he was sorry to be finding out certain things about the country now, just as he was leaving Italy behind after his first and, no doubt, last visit.

He put the guidebooks away in his suitcase, put the suitcase in the overhead rack, and took off his coat so he could use it for a wrap. He switched off the light and sat there in the darkened compartment with his eyes closed, hoping sleep would come.

After what seemed a long time, and just when he thought he was going to drop off, the train began to slow. It came to a stop at a little station outside of Basel. There, a middle-aged man in a dark suit, and wearing a hat, entered the compartment. The man said something to Myers in a language Myers didn't understand, and then the man put his leather bag up into the rack. He sat down on the other side of the compartment and straightened his shoulders. Then he pulled his hat over his eyes. By the time the train was moving again, the man was asleep and snoring quietly. Myers envied him. In a few minutes, a Swiss official opened the door of the compartment and turned on the light. In English, and in some other language — German, Myers assumed — the official asked to see their passports. The man in the compartment with Myers pushed the hat back on his head, blinked his eyes, and reached into his coat pocket. The official studied the passport, looked at the man closely, and gave him back the document. Myers handed over his own passport. The official read the data, examined the photograph, and then looked at Myers before nodding and giving it back. He turned off the light as he went out. The man across from Myers pulled the hat over his eyes and put out his legs. Myers supposed he'd go right back to sleep, and once again he felt envy.

He stayed awake after that and began to think of the meeting with his son, which was now only a few hours away. How would he act when he

saw the boy at the station? Should he embrace him? He felt uncomfortable with that prospect. Or should he merely offer his hand, smile as if these eight years had never occurred, and then pat the boy on the shoulder? Maybe the boy would say a few words — *I'm glad to see you* — *How was your trip?* And Myers would say — something. He really didn't know what he was going to say.

The French *contrôleur* walked by the compartment. He looked in on Myers and at the man sleeping across from Myers. This same *contrôleur* had already punched their tickets, so Myers turned his head and went back to looking out the window. More houses began to appear. But now there were no walls, and the houses were smaller and set closer together. Soon, Myers was sure, he'd see a French village. The haze was lifting. The train blew its whistle and sped past a crossing over which a barrier had been lowered. He saw a young woman with her hair pinned up and wearing a sweater, standing with her bicycle as she watched the cars whip past.

"How's your mother?" he might say to the boy after they had walked a little way from the station. "What do you hear from your mother?" For a wild instant, it occurred to Myers she could be dead. But then he understood that it couldn't be so, he'd have heard something — one way or the other, he'd have heard. He knew if he let himself go on thinking about these things, his heart could break. He closed the top button of his shirt and fixed his tie. He laid his coat across the seat next to him. He laced his shoes, got up, and stepped over the legs of the sleeping man. He let himself out of the compartment.

Myers had to put his hand against the windows along the corridor to steady himself as he moved towards the end of the car. He closed the door to the little toilet and locked it. Then he ran water and splashed his face. The train moved into a curve, still at the same high speed, and Myers had to hold onto the sink for balance.

The boy's letter had come to him a couple of months ago. The letter had been brief. He wrote that he'd been living in France and studying for the past year at the university in Strasbourg. There was no other information about what had possessed him to go to France, or what he'd been doing with himself during those years before France. Appropriately enough, Myers thought, no mention was made in the letter of the boy's mother — not a clue to her condition or whereabouts. But, inexplicably, the boy had closed the letter with the word "Love," and Myers had pondered this for a long while. Finally, he'd answered the letter. After some deliberation, Myers wrote to say he had been thinking for some time of

making a little trip to Europe. Would the boy like to meet him at the station in Strasbourg? He signed his letter, "Love, Dad." He heard back from the boy and then he'd made his arrangements. It struck him that there was really no one, besides his secretary and a few business associates, that he felt it was necessary to tell he was going away. He had accumulated six weeks of vacation at the engineering firm where he worked, and he decided he would take all of the time coming to him for this trip. He was glad he'd done this, even though he now had no intention of spending all that time in Europe.

He'd gone first to Rome. But after the first few hours, walking around by himself on the streets, he was sorry he hadn't arranged to be with a group. He was lonely. He went to Venice, a city he and his wife had always talked of visiting. But Venice was a disappointment. He saw a man with one arm eating fried squid, and there were grimy, water-stained buildings everywhere he looked. He took a train to Milan, where he checked into a four-star hotel and spent the night watching a soccer match on a Sony color TV until the station went off the air. He got up the next morning and wandered around the city until it was time to go to the station. He'd planned the stopover in Strasbourg as the culmination of his trip. After a day or two, or three days — he'd see how it went — he would travel to Paris and fly home. He was tired of trying to make himself understood to strangers and would be glad to get back.

Someone tried the door to the WC. Myers finished tucking his shirt. He fastened his belt. Then he unlocked the door and, swaying with the movement of the train, walked back to his compartment. As he opened the door, he saw at once that his coat had been moved. It lay across a different seat than the one where he'd left it. He felt he had entered into a ludicrous but potentially serious situation. His heart began to race as he picked up the coat. He put his hand into the inside pocket and took out his passport. He carried his wallet in his hip pocket. So he still had his wallet and the passport. He went through the other coat pockets. What was missing was the gift he'd bought for the boy — an expensive Japanese wristwatch purchased at a shop in Rome. He had carried the watch in his inside coat pocket for safekeeping. Now the watch was gone.

"Pardon," he said to the man who slumped in the seat, legs out, the hat over his eyes. "Pardon." The man pushed the hat back and opened his eyes. He pulled himself up and looked at Myers. His eyes were large. He might have been dreaming. But he might not.

Myers said, "Did you see somebody come in here?"

But it was clear the man didn't know what Myers was saying. He

continued to stare at him with what Myers took to be a look of total incomprehension. But maybe it was something else, Myers thought. Maybe the look masked slyness and deceit. Myers shook his coat to focus the man's attention. Then he put his hand into the pocket and rummaged. He pulled his sleeve back and showed the man his own wristwatch. The man looked at Myers and then at Myers's watch. He seemed mystified. Myers tapped the face of his watch. He put his other hand back into his coat pocket and made a gesture as if he were fishing for something. Myers pointed at the watch once more and waggled his fingers, hoping to signify the wristwatch taking flight out the door.

The man shrugged and shook his head.

"Goddammit," Myers said in frustration. He put his coat on and went out into the corridor. He couldn't stay in the compartment another minute. He was afraid he might strike the man. He looked up and down the corridor, as if hoping he could see and recognize the thief. But there was no one around. Maybe the man who shared his compartment hadn't taken the watch. Maybe someone else, the person who tried the door to the WC, had walked past the compartment, spotted the coat and the sleeping man, and simply opened the door, gone through the pockets, closed the door, and gone away again.

Myers walked slowly to the end of the car, peering into the other compartments. It was not crowded in this first-class car, but there were one or two people in each compartment. Most of them were asleep, or seemed to be. Their eyes were closed, and their heads were thrown back against the seats. In one compartment a man about his own age sat by the window looking out at the countryside. When Myers stopped at the glass and looked in at him, the man turned and regarded him fiercely.

Myers crossed into the second-class car. The compartments in this car were crowded — sometimes five or six passengers in each, and the people, he could tell at a glance, were more desperate. Many of them were awake — it was too uncomfortable to sleep — and they turned their eyes on him as he passed. Foreigners, he thought. It was clear to him that if the man in his compartment hadn't taken the watch, then the thief was from one of these compartments. But what could he do? It was hopeless. The watch was gone. It was in someone else's pocket now. He couldn't hope to make the *contrôleur* understand what had happened. And even if he could, then what? He made his way back to his own compartment. He looked in and saw that the man had stretched out again with his hat over his eyes.

Myers stepped over the man's legs and sat down in his seat by the

window. He felt dazed with anger. They were on the outskirts of the city now. Farms and grazing land had given over to industrial plants with unpronounceable names on the fronts of the buildings. The train began slowing. Myers could see automobiles on city streets, and others waiting in line at the crossings for the train to pass. He got up and took his suitcase down. He held it on his lap while he looked out the window at this hateful place.

It came to him that he didn't want to see the boy after all. He was shocked by this realization and for a moment felt diminished by the meanness of it. He shook his head. In a lifetime of foolish actions, this trip was possibly the most foolish thing he'd ever done. But the fact was, he really had no desire to see this boy whose behavior had long ago isolated him from Myers's affections. He suddenly, and with great clarity, recalled the boy's face when he had lunged that time, and a wave of bitterness passed over Myers. This boy had devoured Myers's youth, had turned the young girl he had courted and wed into a nervous, alcoholic woman whom the boy alternately pitied and bullied. Why on earth, Myers asked himself, would he come all this way to see someone he disliked? He didn't want to shake the boy's hand, the hand of his enemy, nor have to clap him on the shoulder and make small talk. He didn't want to have to ask him about his mother.

He sat forward in the seat as the train pulled into the station. An announcement was called out in French over the train's intercom. The man across from Myers began to stir. He adjusted his hat and sat up in the seat as something else in French came over the speaker. Myers didn't understand anything that was said. He grew more agitated as the train slowed and then came to a stop. He decided he wasn't going to leave the compartment. He was going to sit where he was until the train pulled away. When it did, he'd be on it, going on with the train to Paris, and that would be that. He looked out the window cautiously, afraid he'd see the boy's face at the glass. He didn't know what he'd do if that happened. He was afraid he might shake his fist. He saw a few people on the platform wearing coats and scarves who stood next to their suitcases, waiting to board the train. A few other people waited, without luggage, hands in their pockets, obviously expecting to meet someone. His son was not one of those waiting, but of course that didn't mean he wasn't out there somewhere. Myers moved the suitcase off his lap onto the floor and inched down in his seat.

The man across from him was yawning and looking out the window.

Now he turned his gaze on Myers. He took off his hat and ran his hand through his hair. Then he put the hat back on, got to his feet, and pulled his bag down from the rack. He opened the compartment door. But before he went out, he turned around, and gestured in the direction of the station.

“Strasbourg,” the man said.

Myers turned away.

The man waited an instant longer, and then went out into the corridor with his bag and, Myers felt certain, with the wristwatch. But that was the least of his concerns now. He looked out the train window once again. He saw a man in an apron standing in the door of the station, smoking a cigarette. The man was watching two trainmen explaining something to a woman in a long skirt who held a baby in her arms. The woman listened and then nodded and listened some more. She moved the baby from one arm to the other. The man kept talking. She listened. One of the men chuckled the baby under its chin. The woman looked down and smiled. She moved the baby again and listened some more. Myers saw a young couple embracing on the platform a little distance from his car. Then the young man let go of the young woman. He said something, picked up his valise, and moved to board the train. The woman watched him go. She brought a hand up to her face, touched one eye and then the other with the heel of her hand. In a minute, Myers saw her moving down the platform, her eyes fixed on his car, as if following someone. He glanced away from the woman and looked at the big clock over the station’s waiting room. He looked up and down the platform. The boy was nowhere in sight. It was possible he had overslept or it might be that he too had changed his mind. In any case, Myers felt relieved. He looked at the clock again, then at the young woman who was hurrying up to the window where he sat. Myers drew back as if she were going to strike the glass.

The door to the compartment opened. The young man he’d seen outside closed the door behind him and said, “*Bonjour.*” Without waiting for a reply, he threw his valise into the overhead rack and stepped over to the window. “*Pardon.*” He pulled the window down. “*Marie,*” he said. The young woman began to smile and cry at the same time. The young man brought her hands up and began kissing her fingers.

Myers looked away and clamped his teeth. He heard the final shouts of the trainmen. Someone blew a whistle. Presently, the train began to move away from the platform. The young man had let go of the woman’s hands, but he continued to wave at her as the train rolled forward.

But the train went only a short distance, into the open air of the rail yard, and then Myers felt it come to an abrupt stop. The young man closed the window and moved over to the seat by the door. He took a newspaper from his coat and began to read. Myers got up and opened the door. He went to the end of the corridor where the cars were coupled together. He didn't know why they had stopped. Maybe something was wrong. He moved to the window. But all he could see was an intricate system of tracks where trains were being made up, cars taken off or switched from one train to another. He stepped back from the window. The sign on the door to the next car said, "*Poussez.*" Myers struck the sign with his fist, and the door slid open. He was in the second-class car again. He passed along a row of compartments filled with people settling down, as if making ready for a long trip. He needed to find out from someone where this train was going. He had understood, at the time he purchased his ticket, that the train to Strasbourg went on to Paris. But he felt it would be humiliating to put his head into one of the compartments and say, "Paree?" or however they said it — as if asking if they'd arrived at a destination. He heard a loud clanking, and the train backed up a little. He could see the station again, and once more he thought of his son. Maybe he was standing back there, breathless from having rushed to get to the station, wondering what had happened to his father. Myers shook his head.

The car he was in creaked and groaned under him, then something caught and fell heavily into place. Myers looked out at the maze of tracks and realized that the train had begun to move again. He returned and hurried back to the end of the car and crossed back into the car he'd been traveling in. He walked down the corridor to his compartment. But the young man with the newspaper was gone. And Myers's suitcase was gone. It was not his compartment after all. He realized with a start they must have uncoupled his car while the train was in the yard and attached another second-class car to the train. The compartment he stood in front of was nearly filled with small, dark-skinned men who spoke rapidly in a language Myers had never heard before. One of the men signalled him to come inside. Myers moved into the compartment, and the men made room for him. There seemed to be a jovial air in the compartment. The man who'd signalled him laughed and patted the space next to him. Myers sat down with his back to the front of the train. The countryside out the window began to pass faster and faster. For a moment, Myers had the impression of the landscape shooting away from him. He was going

somewhere, he knew that. And if it was the wrong direction, sooner or later he'd find it out.

He leaned against the seat and closed his eyes. The men went on talking and laughing. Their voices came to him as if from a distance. Soon the voices became part of the train's movements — and gradually Myers felt himself being carried, then pulled back, into sleep.

For Jeromé — with Love and Kisses

BY GORDON LISH

Volume 41, Number 3 Summer 1983

Gordon Lish received the O. Henry Award for this story. Other stories by him have appeared in these pages periodically since fall 1978. He is editor of *Quarterly* magazine.

Jaydeezie darling,
dear cutie fellow,
my wonderful son Jerome,

You will do me a favor and please answer me this question, please God it should not be for you too much trouble for you to do it. So you will take all of two seconds and you will tell me, Jerome, since when did you hear of a civilized person which gets rid of a perfectly good unlisted and then goes and gets another one on top of it? Also, darling, assuming you could see your way clear to fit it into your busy schedule, you will inform me as to the whys and wherefores of how come the same aforementioned individual couldn't exhibit the simple courtesy to first communicate to his own father the particulars with regard to the necessary digits. So this is asking too much, Jerrychik? I mean, first and foremost your father wants your assurance he is not causing you too big a perturbation. Listen, you will be a sport and you will take two seconds and you will list for me the reasons for this behavior. Because to tell you the truth, pussycat, in my personal opinion I think your father is entitled to hear an explanation.

I am waiting, darling. God willing, you will go into private conference with your heart of hearts and think it over and advise me of your decision. So you could do this for me, cutie fellow? Because I your father am meanwhile sitting here on pins and needles expecting. Make yourself a promise that in a voice which is calmness itself you will pick up the telephone for the sole and exclusive purpose of advising your father whether you decided in your mind if this is the behavior of a civilized person.

Meanwhile, who could help himself but to think along the lines of a certain possible conjecture? So plunge a dagger into my breast for giving serious consideration to the following theory, but are we dealing here with a situation where the party of the first part says to himself, “The phone rings and I pick it up, it could be the party of the second part trying to communicate with me, but could he do it if I get another new unlisted?”

So go ahead and plunge a dagger, Jerome, because what I just told you is more or less along the lines of your father’s personal thinking. And may I inform you, darling, that the father who is doing this thinking is also the same father who two seconds ago only wanted in his heart of hearts to say hello to you and wish his cutie fellow Happy High Holidays?

Sonny boy, I will tell you something. You got my permission to stab me in a vital organ for passing comment, but I want you to hear with your own two ears my appraisal of the foregoing situation. Because the answer is it’s not nice. Jerome, when I see behavior like this, I have to say it is not nice. And thank God I still got the strength in my body to say it. But don’t look at *me*, Jerome — because your father did not make the rules, even if the rule is it’s definitely not.

And so long as we are discussing the philosophy in this particular department, Jerome, I will tell you something else. Objectively speaking, in my personal opinion your whole area code should be ashamed of itself to have an operator that’s got the unmitigated gall to say to a senior citizen get lost. Because in so many words, darling, this is just what the snip up there in 603 said. For shame, Jerome, for shame! And to a person of your father’s years and age.

Are you listening to me, darling? To your own flesh and blood, a total stranger says get lost! So tell me, boychik, this is what they teach them in your area code? Or did she get some coaching from a mutual party of our acquaintance who at this juncture your father will leave unnamed? In so many words, take a walk? I want you to tell me, Jerome, what kind of a person says take a walk to the father of the child? Because I hope I do not have to remind you that the father who heard these words

said to him is also the same father who would lay down his life for his cutie boy, please God I should only be alive and well to do it when you got nothing better planned and you decide in your mind it's time to ask.

Look, darling, if God makes a miracle and you find the strength to call me, who knows, maybe you could afford to take an extra two seconds to give me the figures on what it costs you in so many dollars and cents to get an operator to talk like this to a person of my advanced years, never mind if I told her it was an emergency and also that the party in question is my very own child. Listen, would the woman divulge the first digit? You are down to her on your hands and knees, but is this a normal area code with a single shred of human decency?

Boychik, I am sitting here and I am thinking certain thoughts to myself. So are you interested in the nature of your father's current thinking? Because the answer is if a certain person wants to be a hermit, well and good — then let him go live where they don't have an area code to begin with. But barring this contingency, I say that so long as you continue to maintain your permanent residence in 603, I think that I your father have a perfect right to be informed as to the rest of the particulars after these three digits!

Tell me, darling, did you ever stop to consider all of the ramifications of the situation we are dealing with? So stop to think and tell me what if, for instance, it was a question of in sickness or in health? I want you to think about this, Jerome. I want you to consider it very carefully. They come in here and they shoot your father in the head. So like any normal person, I rush to the telephone to call you up and tell you the news. But what is the upshot in the situation we are considering? What is in this case the net result? Believe me, your father didn't have to go to college to describe to you the result. Because the answer is it's some snip up there in 603 which says to me when I am bleeding to death in so many words get lost!

Okay, so don't excite yourself, Jerrychik.

I promise you, all is forgiven, all is forgotten. And besides, it was only for the sake of argument I said it could be a question of in sickness or in health. So far they didn't come in here yet and shoot me. All right, you never know, but so far they didn't. Meanwhile, thank God it was only a question of hello and goodbye, my sonny boy should live and be well. I give you my written guarantee, Jerome, this is all your father had scheduled for the agenda, Happy High Holidays and hello and goodbye. In two seconds flat, the whole deal would have been over and done with, and you would have lived to tell the tale.

So go pick up a hammer and bang me on the head with it because your father was going crazy to hear his sonny boy's voice. Cutie guy, you know what? I only hope and pray I am alive to see the day when vice versa is the case. Please God, Heaven should make a miracle and your father should live that long, you won't have to worry, his number is in the book. Believe me, you would not have to talk yourself blue in the face, Jerome. You would not have to stand on your left ear and dance a jig and then hear my particular area code say to my son, "That's cute, that's nice, now take a walk."



So what is it now, darling? First, it was your own room. Next, it was your own business. So now, in the final analysis, season after season, it's what?

Sonny boy, can your father give you a piece of his personal advice? You promise you wouldn't excite yourself if your father talks to you from the bottom of his heart of hearts? Because I am here to tell you, darling, sometimes your father does not know if he dares to open his mouth with you. But who can breathe with this on my chest, such a burden it's like a big stone? So go get a hammer and hit me with it, but meanwhile it is on your father's chest and he's got to get it off.

Sweetie boy, you know what it means where it says enough is enough? It means you do not go overboard! It means whatever the department, it gets handled accordingly. Because there comes a time in every life when enough is definitely enough. And you know something? Your father did not have to go to college to tell you this is the rule. But go look it up for yourself, it's there in black and white. You name me the department, the answer is you don't go overboard, the rule is enough is enough. Like with the woman who goes up to the judge, for instance, you heard about this, Jerome? So this woman says to this judge, "You'll give me a divorce," and the judge says back to her, "At your age you want a divorce? You are how old, ninety, ninety-five?" And the woman says to him, "Ninety-seven last July." So the judge says to her, "You come to me now, ninety-seven last July?" You hear this, Jerome? That judge says to this woman, "Why come to me now, a person who could any instant drop dead?"

Jerome darling, I want you to know what this woman said to this judge. Sweetheart, are you listening with both ears? She said to this man, "Because enough is enough."

This is wisdom, darling. I don't have to tell you, this is wisdom.

Granted, you are a genius in your own right. But even a genius could live and learn. Even a brilliant man like that judge could. Believe me, Jerrychik, that woman didn't have to go to college and study at the feet of no Einstein to teach that judge what it's all about. And the man was an educated man, Jerome. But just ask yourself, did he or did he not have a lot to learn?

Boychik, this is your father's advice to you from your father's heart of hearts. In words of one syllable, darling, there comes a time when you have to say to yourself enough is enough. But let's face it, who am I to open up my mouth and try to teach a genius like yourself? Listen, just because I am the father and know from bitter experience, does this make me entitled to tell you what it's all about? Forget even that I am the elder, Jerome. Forget even that I as your father would jump off the highest building for you. It still doesn't give me the right to come along and spell out the facts of life for a person who is a genius, even if it just so happens he doesn't know which end is up.

But meanwhile, boychik, your father knows what he knows, and he didn't wait around for some professor to come along and spell out the facts of life. You name me the subject, Jerome, every college in the world will tell you there is one rule that is first and foremost, and for your information it's the one which says enough is definitely enough. Granted, a genius has a perfect right to think to himself, "I am a genius and I just discovered a subject where the rule is enough is never enough." You think your father doesn't understand this, Jerome? You think your father doesn't realize that with a genius the brain gets all balled up and it says to itself, "I just found a subject where all bets are off"?

So just for argument's sake, sweetheart, let's consider this particular situation. Because your father is willing to go along with you and consider the question from all sides. Like just suppose I pick a subject off the top of my cuff and we go ahead and examine it like two civilized adults. So how about for instance PRIVACY maybe? Let's for instance consider a person who says to you he has got to have his PRIVACY or else. So for two seconds, Jerome, you and your father will make believe that this is our subject, P-R-I-V-A-C-Y.

Now tell me darling, did your father know the one to pick? Because don't worry, Jerrychik, this subject your father could put his hands on it for you *blindfolded* even with his eyes shut and the room is pitch-black. Not to mention he could also spell it for you backwards and sideways and meanwhile tell you it still comes out the same thing, which is G-E-T L-O-S-T. But God forbid your father should dare to spell for a person who

is a genius and is supposed to know how to spell for himself.

Listen, pussycat, you don't have to stand on ceremony with me, I promise you. Go ahead, whenever you're ready, I'm ready. Go get a hammer or a dagger, whichever it wouldn't be too big of an effort for you to get. Believe me, sweetheart, as a genius and as a brilliant child, you got a perfect right to go ahead and get whatever pleases you. I say God willing you could even spare the time to get up and go look for it, maybe you could lay your hands on a red-hot poker and put out both my eyes with it if this is what will make you feel better. Because you know what, Jerome? Your father just heard himself mention the subject of privacy, so he doesn't deserve whatever you decide in your mind is the worst punishment?

Maybe you should call the F.B.I., Jerome.

So call the F.B.I. because your father had the gall to talk to you from the bottom of his heart of hearts.

Do you hear me, Jerome? I am waiting for whatever punishment in your brilliant opinion would be the one I couldn't take. Because if just breathing your father makes such a loud noise you couldn't hear yourself think, all you got to do is pick up the telephone and tell them you want to report me. So you'll call the G-men instead of the F.B.I. if the F.B.I. answers and they tell you right this minute they're so busy they couldn't take the case.

✄ ✄ ✄

Listen, Jerome darling, I want to give you every assurance your father would not blame you for one instant if you went and got another new unlisted on top of the one you just got. But why knock yourself out, darling? Use your common sense. You think your father would stand by and let you have to go all the way down to the telephone company and wait around to all hours until they get good and ready to inform you as to the ins and outs of your new digits? Believe me, cutie guy, you only have to ask and your father will spare you all this heartache. Because even if with just my mouth breathing, it's so loud you couldn't bear it, forget the phone company, all you got to do is speak up. Do you think I your father would deny you one shred of your happiness for one single instant? So why hesitate? A signal is all your father asks for. You wouldn't even have to lift a finger if the racket the blood in my veins makes happens to constitute such a terrible perturbation to your privacy you don't get the peace and quiet to be a genius. You could wink, darling. Lifting a finger, I definitely don't recommend it. Who knows, you might strain something

— it's not worth it to take a chance. One wink, boychik, and all your worries will be over. One wink will be perfectly sufficient — believe me. Because your father will take it from there, your father will do all the running, whereas you yourself could just sit back and relax and forget it. Don't worry, you wouldn't even have to give me a whole wink if you decide in your mind you don't feel like it. Darling, you could give me maybe a mini-wink if this is your decision. Because I guarantee you, sweetheart, one mini-wink and already your father will be racing up the stairs of this building, hoping and praying in his heart of hearts the management didn't put no fence around the roof. So I apologize, Jerome, your father when he moved in didn't have the foresight to go take a look in the first place.

But do I make myself clear, darling? Answer me, it is not going in one ear and out the other? Because I want you to know that your father could not kill himself fast enough if this is what it takes to make sure his sonny boy gets every last ounce of all the bliss he's got coming to him. But I ask you, pussycat, solitude? Are you telling me forever and forever solitude and seclusion is what it takes? Because I am willing to learn, sweetheart, so tell me. So show me where it says solitude and seclusion is the same thing as happiness, and meanwhile one peep out of anybody who adores you to pieces is such a tragedy you couldn't stand it. In black and white, Jerome, show me where this is written. Because as dumb as your father is, he is still keeping an open mind. But until you get ready to show me, in the interim don't excite yourself, darling, your father just gave you his solemn promise. If a telephone call or a postcard or a letter is such a tumult for you that you couldn't take it, even if it's only for hello and goodbye and I hope I didn't disturb you, then relax, pussycat, don't worry, one mini-wink from you will settle the whole affair. Do you hear me? One mini-wink and your father will be only too happy and glad to make you a present of his own dead body. And you know what? You wouldn't even have to thank me for it if you're too busy being a hermit and a genius.

Are you listening to me, boychik? Are you paying strict attention? Your father is not talking just to hear himself talk? Because I can't rest for a single solitary instant until I make sure in my heart of hearts you heard me. Listen, maybe you should write it down that your father is ready and willing to go to his grave in case his presence here on the earth doesn't give his boychik all the privacy he needs. Also, make a note that a full wink is utterly uncalled for. A little wiggle of the eyelid like you are maybe just thinking of winking but are altogether too tired to do it, I

promise you your father will run next door to another building if, God forbid, it turns out that this one here got a fence on the roof. Sweetheart, I only hope and pray the upshot is I don't have to keep you waiting. As God is my judge, I'm sorry, but at my years and age, a fence, who knows, maybe I couldn't climb over it and meanwhile there's nobody up there waiting to give me a boost. But even if the next building it's the same story, don't worry, darling, there's buildings up and down the block, and your father will just keep looking until something works out.

This, sweetheart, is my solemn promise to you. And all I got to say is that I am down on my hands and knees thanking God that your father still got the strength in his body to give you his sworn statement in writing. But, believe me, Jerome, if in all these years this is what you needed, you only had to say so. Because it's just like with the man who goes to get the suit. So he says to the tailor, "You'll make me a suit—whatever it costs, it costs, I want the best, so don't worry." And the tailor says to him, "Okay, I'm sparing nothing. The cloth I'm getting special from Borneo, the thread I'll have made up in China, and for the buttons I am thinking in terms of this yak they got in Turkey, buttons from the horns of that yak." So the man says to the tailor, "This sounds to me like a wonderful suit, so when can I get it?" and the tailor says to him, "A production like this, from here and from there, everything made up to order, we're talking six, eight months *minimum*." So the man says, "Six, eight months! How can I wait six, eight months if I got a bar mitzvah this Saturday and I was thinking of wearing the suit?"

Jerome darling, would you like to listen with your own two ears to what that tailor said to that man? Because this is what he said to him. He said, "You need it, you'll get it."

So do I make myself clear, Jerome? Why stand on ceremony? You'll wiggle your eyelid a little and in two seconds your father will take himself right out of the picture.



Meanwhile, who knows, maybe I am jumping to too many conclusions. Maybe 603 wasn't working right because of the High Holy Days, such a strain all of a sudden on the electricity. Let's face it, you got sons and daughters galore calling down here from all the different area codes, and meanwhile your father is the only person who is calling in the opposite direction, maybe I got some kind of funny hook-up and it wasn't even 603 in the first place. But be this as it may, you still do not say go get lost to a person when he is asking you a perfectly civilized question. Listen,

darling, please God they don't get fired up there in 603 and come down here to 305 looking. Because I can tell you, with a mouth on them like the one your father heard, they don't hire you so fast in this area code. Not even if you got in your pocket the personal recommendation of a genius!

Jerrychik sweetie, it's forgotten and forgiven, so let's forgive and forget it. Meanwile, it's the High Holidays again, so is this the right time for bitterness and recrimination? Sweetie boy, it's water under the bridge. So let's do ourselves a favor and change the conversation. It's a fresh start, boychik. So what if it's another whole year down the crapper and everything is still under par at your end of the bargain? You think your father is keeping score with regard to the question of who sends who cards and letters, never mind who doesn't even place a simple phone call? So big deal if everybody else in 305 is getting. You think I don't know I don't have the right to expect a little decency and consideration when it could always happen you might get a rupture from lifting the wrong pencil? Listen, perish the thought that your father should even look twice at a mailman. Why kid ourselves? Who remembers what one of them even looks like anymore, it's been so many years since your father had the pleasure.

Listen, darling, before you forget, with your own two hands you better check around for the nearest blunt instrument. Because I hear myself talk to you and what is it but criticism after criticism? Promise me, Jerome, you won't spend too much money. So long as it's good and heavy, go ahead and make the investment and then give it to me right between the eyes or on the back of my head, whichever you decide in your mind is more convenient. Because here I am, writing to bring you High Holiday greetings, and what am I bringing you but recrimination after recrimination in spite of my honest intentions. And even if it's all for your own benefit, Jerome, I still say shame on me, shame on me! Look, when you get through with the blunt instrument, you should leave instructions for them to put your father in the gas chamber and keep him on bread and water. No leniency, Jerome — your father didn't earn in his lifetime one iota! The gas chamber and then the rubber hose, Jerome, even this is still too good for a person of my caliber.

Sonny boy, can you find it in your heart of hearts to wipe the slate clean? Because so far as your father is concerned, from this very instant it's a whole new ballgame. It's like we're starting from the outset, okay? Whatever I said, promise me, darling, you erased it. I mean, it just occurred to me you maybe sent a little something but you forgot about the

zip code. A genius like you with so much on his brain, so who's got room in a thing like that for so many extra numbers? So ask yourself, you leave off the zip code, do the morons deliver? Believe me, you're just lucky if they don't also come after you to your own personal address and tear you limb from limb.

It's the truth, Jerrychik — nothing is what it used to be. It's not like it was in the old days. Tell me, darling, you remember how it was in the old days when you were at the top of the heap and your father was down here up in the penthouse? So guess who is in the penthouse now. Because the Allen people is the answer! And after them, it's the Krantzes which is second on the list to get in there. But in the good old days, it was all different. These days, maybe you got the right idea, a hermit. Believe me, don't think your father hasn't considered. I look at it the way it is these days and I have to say to myself, "Sol, maybe we should all go live where the operator hears they are looking for you and she tells them, whoever they are, forget it, take a walk."

These days, Jerome, it's things of every description, and it is enough to make your father vomit. Go look if you don't believe me. Like even in the kindergarten the teacher says to the children it's milk time, take out your milk and drink it. But, lo and behold, nowadays there is always one child which wouldn't touch it. So the one I have in mind, his name is Arnold, and the teacher says to him, "Arnold, drink your milk." But how does Arnold answer this woman? You wouldn't believe this, Jerome, but he says to her, "I wouldn't drink the goddamn milk."

This, Jerome, is how in this day and age a child answers. So I don't have to tell you the teacher goes right to the telephone and she calls the child's mother and says to this woman to come over. So when the woman gets there, the teacher says to the mother, "I want you to hear this," and then she says to Arnold, "Arnold, drink your milk."

Jerome, as I live and breathe, this is how the child answers her back the second time. He says to her, "Not only I wouldn't drink the goddamn milk, but you could also shove it up your tookis."

Did you hear this, Jerome? Can you in all your born days believe it?

So you know what happens next? Darling, that teacher turns to that mother and she says to the woman, "Did you hear what your son just said?" Jerome, I am ashamed to say it, but that mother turns to that teacher and says to her, "Sure, I heard him — fuck him."

Sonny boy, this is what today's world is. Don't worry, boychik, your father noticed. But speaking of the subject of mothers, Jerome, I just remembered something. Because maybe you called to say hello and I

wasn't here to answer. So even if you called at night, it could have happened, darling, your father not here to pick it up because of a certain Mrs. Pinkowitz, and I am not ashamed to admit it.

I know I don't need to remind you that your father is a grown man, Jerome. In case you didn't realize, your father is an adult. So as a grown man and as an adult, excuses I don't have to make to anyone, a certain resident of 603 included. Sonny boy, these are the facts of life, and it wasn't your father which invented them.

So now you know. So it was only one night, but now you know.



Listen, Jerrychik, between father and son, honesty is the best policy, this is my personal opinion. So it's speaking along these lines, darling, that it is time to come to the subject of Gert Pinkowitz. Do I make myself crystal clear, Jerome? Even in my health and my years, I thank God that romance is not totally out of the picture. But first and foremost, Jerome, your father is the type of person who gives comfort where comfort is due. Now you take the creature previously referred to, for your information this is a person with enough heartache for an army. If you can believe it, darling, even worse than your father, this person suffers and suffers. Not in all your born days could you even guess! But who knows, maybe I already told you what a svelte and adorable creature Gert Pinkowitz is, not to mention that she is also an individual which could give your father cards and spades when it comes to the question of how much agony a human being could stand at the hands of their own flesh and blood. And guess what, boychik — just like your own personal father, it's a son which is the source of where every last shred of Gert Pinkowitz's tragedy is coming from.

Tell me, sweetheart, did you ever think you would live to see the day when I your father would run smack into such a terrific coincidence? Listen, I know it's a small world, but a thing like this is definitely unbelievable — right here in this same building a creature just like your father which also got a son who you could die from.

But who knows if I already made mention? Maybe I did or maybe I didn't in a prior communication. On the other hand, darling, since I didn't write to you the day before yesterday, then I have to say to myself, "Sol, face facts, you didn't." Because when you stop to consider the arithmetic, boychik, it's only twenty-four hours since the woman first set foot on the premises and established her residence in this building.

So okay, sweetie darling, your father has been seeing a certain svelte

person, it is nothing to be ashamed of. So what if it is a whirlwind romance? You think I can't see where the arithmetic speaks for itself? Meanwhile, it couldn't be avoided, two creatures which are both available and got so much agony in mutual.

This is fate, boychik. This is what it means when they say it's fate and you could stand on your left ear but you couldn't avoid it. Like with the fella who says to his brother, "So go to Miami and don't worry, I promise you I'll watch the cat, it'll be all right, in its whole life the cat wouldn't get better looking after." So the brother who's so crazy about his cat goes to Miami, Jerome, and when he gets there, the first thing he does is he picks up the telephone and he calls his brother which is still in New York and he says to him, "So how's the cat?"

Listen, Jerome. Because I want you to hear how the brother in New York answers the brother in Miami when he says to him, "The cat's dead."

So naturally it's a long silence with no one talking. And then the brother in Miami says, "You're some brother I got! I ask you how's the cat, and you answer me, bing bang, the cat's dead! What kind of a way is this to say a thing to a brother, bing bang, the cat's dead? Believe me, you should learn how to say a thing when a person asks you a question — not just bing bang, no preliminaries, no fanfares, the cat's dead! Next time somebody asks you, you say you took the cat up to the roof for a little breath of air and she got a sniffle and you got her in bed and in a few days, please God, she'll be up and around as good as new. So then when I telephone back in a couple of hours to ask you what's what with the cat, you say to me, well, there's complications, you're getting in a specialist, but with God's help she will pull through — not no bing bang, no overtures, the cat's dead! So when I call again to check with you what the specialist said, this is when you say to me you never know, there's no guarantee, the cat you had to rush to the hospital two seconds ago and even with the top men in medical science, lo and behold, the cat passed away. This is how a brother speaks to a brother, not bing bang, the cat's dead!"

So the brother that's in New York, Jerome, he says to the brother in Miami, "Look, I'm sorry, next time I'll know better, I promise you." So this is when the brother who is in Miami says to the brother in New York, "Forget it. So it's only a cat. Meanwhile, more important, how's Mother?"

Jerome darling, are you listening to this? Did you hear when the brother in Miami says to him, "So meanwhile how is Mother?" Now pay

attention, darling, because I want you to also hear what the brother in New York says to the brother in Miami, because this is what he says to him verbatim. He says, "Mother?" He says, "Well, I'll tell you, Mother I took up to the roof for a little breath of air."

This is fate, boychik — this is fate and there is no two ways about it. So between your father and Gert Pinkowitz it's the same story — it's fate whichever direction you look at it from. And don't kid yourself, two individuals in our situation, it couldn't be avoided.

Okay, so at this point everything is still in the dating stage. But even with Romeo and Juliet themselves, you had to have your dating stage before it got around to this and that and the other thing. Believe me, your father is a patient man, Jerome — thirty-six hours, forty-eight hours, for a living doll like this, a person so svelte, your father could make an exception and wait to count his chickens.

But for some things, sweetheart, patience is already beside the point, patience wouldn't make the big difference.

Sonny boy, Jerome darling, do me a favor and listen to me — because your father is here to tell you that in certain departments not even the patience of a saint would do the trick.

So call the G-men, Jerome. And if the G-men wouldn't give you total satisfaction, then maybe you could get somewhere with the Supreme Court or the Food and Drug. Darling, just so long as you know your father couldn't help himself, he has to speak up. *Enough is enough!*

So first you will take your time and decide which one you want to call to come and get me. And in the meanwhile, your father gives you his promise, he wouldn't budge from this very spot. Also, I wouldn't even put up a fight when they come with the handcuffs.

Jerome, I am giving you every assurance, darling, your father will go quietly, he wouldn't even begin to make a fuss.

But if you are asking me to keep my mouth shut when it comes to the question of the envelope, from the bottom of my heart of hearts, I am sorry, Jerome — but this I could not promise you, not even if they made a law.

Cutie fellow, pussycat, stop to ask yourself — your father gets to the end of this letter, what comes next? Because the answer is the envelope. So just like it was first the cat and then the

mother, here is another one where it is a question of fate and you couldn't avoid it. Sonny boy, you leave off the zip code and they don't deliver. So ask yourself, how much leeway does your father get, could he leave off two-thirds of a person's whole name?

No, he couldn't. But also could your father write it any different from how he has been writing it all these years and years?

Darling, this is a question you don't need your father to answer.

Just so you know in advance that I your father tried to give this question every last ounce of consideration. But meanwhile, Jerome, the answer is forget it with this J.D. thing — because even if they made a law, not on a bet could your father ever do it! You hear me, darling? Not even if the G-men took the case and come down here with all their badges. Not even if the Supreme Court said to me, “Sol, it went nine to nothing against you, so for life it's Leavenworth,” forget it.

Jerrychik, your father is an old man. But whatever the future holds, he would spend every minute of it in chains before he would go along with you on what you did to your wonderful name.

Listen, kiddo, you could go to Woolworth's and you could buy thumbtacks. Darling, you could even buy carpet tacks if this is your particular preference. So go ahead and buy whichever variety that pleases you and come stick them in my elbows. Okay, so if the elbows don't interest you, I'll give you a choice, you can choose the kneecaps instead. So choose the kneecaps, Jerome. Believe me, if this is what you decide in your mind then this is what you decide in your mind — kneecaps, your father wouldn't for two seconds stand in your way. Tell me, boychik, are you getting the picture? Because the picture is this, Jerome — in every last department your father is only too happy and glad to go along with you, but this J.D. thing you did to your name, this he could never get used to! This thing here is where he has to draw the line!

I'm sorry, sweetheart, but J.D. I couldn't go along with, not even if they came down here with their handcuffs and shot me down like a dog. Because by me, darling, the name you were born with, you could go ahead and ask anyone, they'll tell you it is a symphony of music to the most discriminating of ears.

I promise you, sonny boy, you could go to the ends of the earth and you still couldn't improve on it. Just to listen to it! So are you listening?

Jerome David.

Now tell me that's not the last word when it comes to a symphony of names.

But a thing like J.D., Jerome, since when is a thing like this a name?

Cutie guy, you want to kill your father with this thing of J.D., then go ahead and kill me with it. But meanwhile don't ask me to write it on the envelope. Because if this is what you are asking, darling, then you are asking for what your father could not give!



Stop to think, pussycat. Promise me you won't excite yourself and you will stop to think for all of two seconds.

So first of all, answer me the following question. There isn't a thoroughfare called Jerome in the Bronx? As thoroughfares go, it's not one which down through the ages is a thoroughfare that is famous and respected?

So is this a simple question? And does a person have to be a genius to give it a simple answer?

Sonny boy, take my word for it, when the city fathers sat down to pick a name, they didn't say to themselves, "So let's pick a schtunky one for this one here."

Okay, I admit it, so maybe it was the borough fathers which sat down. It's still the same principle. Believe me, darling, right here in the Sunshine State, where I your father bring you High Holy Day greetings from, on Lincoln Avenue they got a Jerome Florists. On Lincoln Avenue, darling. So am I talking about a first-class thoroughfare? Look for yourself, as big as life, a Jerome Florists. And it's not just here or there, darling — because it's *Lincoln Avenue*, not to mention also a corner location!

But listen, a father does not know a son? I need all of a sudden a mindreader to tell me what's in my sonny boy's head? So arrest me because I happen to know my own child. Tell them to come and lock up your father on bread and water in Death Row because I happen to be an expert on my sonny boy's brain. Meanwhile, you can stand on your left ear but you cannot change the rule that says it takes a father to know a son. Jerome, they could come and cut off both my arms. They could chop me up in little pieces. But I your father am here to tell you, a father knows a son.

Guess what, darling. Are you listening to me, Jerome? To the fathers of this world, a son is what is eating your heart out — and you don't need no Walter Winchell to come along and give you this particular news.

But don't think I don't know I should learn to keep my mouth shut. Believe me, Jerome, they should come and cut your father's throat from ear to ear until he learns to bite his tongue. *Lincoln Avenue* — I had to go

ahead and say Lincoln Avenue. So does a father have to go to college to find out what is in his sonny boy's head? Don't kid yourself, Jerome, your father can hear every last word you are thinking. Does a father know a son? I guarantee you, darling, your father could quote you your exact phraseology, word for bitter word.

"So how come they didn't name me Lincoln?"

Boychik, tell me the truth, was that verbatim? Open your heart of hearts to me and tell me, did your father just quote you every single word?

Don't tell me the answer because I know the answer. And you know why, Jerome? Because a father knows a son! And you know what else, darling? The more brilliant the brain of the child, the more you cannot please him — not even if you did a dance and stood on your left ear.

Kiddo, this is what your father knows. You could talk yourself blue in the face, but this is what your father knows.

Oh, but you really got a lot to complain about, Jerome — a father which gave you a gorgeous name and then has the gall to write it down on an envelope instead of something it makes him heartsick to even mention out loud. Believe me, I never saw a boy with more to complain about. But don't kid yourself, sonny, it's no picnic for me neither. I promise you, all I need is an excuse and I'll show you it's a subject I couldn't drop fast enough. But so long as you didn't give me an excuse yet, it couldn't hurt to mention a few comparisons.

Like take, for instance, a certain Mrs. Roth who lives in this building. So tell me, darling, does she have a relation who is a Philip or a P.? Or look instead at the Bellow people who got such a nice oceanview on 10. Ask yourself, do they have a second-cousin named Saul or a second-cousin named S.? The Malamuds on 6, a one-bedroom facing front, we're talking in this case about a Bernard in the family or a B.?

Please God, darling, you stopped and took a good look at these questions, and then you answered each and every one of them from deep down in your heart of hearts.

But now we come to your father, Jerome. Do you appreciate what I am saying to you, Jerome — now we come to your own flesh and blood? Who is *also* a resident of this building! Who *also* has to live with these people! Who *also* has to answer to them! And what, pray tell, is the question?

Jerome, the questions is, "J.D., Mr. Ess — what, please be so kind, is a J.D.?"

Cutie guy, pay attention — down here in 305 a Saul they heard of, a

Philip, a Bernard. But since when did somebody in 305 ever hear of a J.D.? Stop to think, boychik. Because in this building this is the question your father has to answer to morning, noon, and night. And you know for how many years now? Day in and day out, you know for how many?



This is why I say to you, Jerome, thank God for Gert Pinkowitz. This is why I have to say to you thank God for the heartache she's got with her own kid, because for your father it's a lesson to see there's those that got worse — even if I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.

Twenty-four hours, Jerome, the woman is in the building only twenty-four hours, and already the gang of them found better to talk about!

But believe me, I don't wish the woman ill. For Gert Pinkowitz, your father's got nothing but hearts and flowers. It's just I couldn't take it no more — J.D. this and J.D. that, years and years, day in and day out, the whole building couldn't leave you in peace. Besides, darling, *svelte* as Gert is, the woman is made of iron. Of *iron*.

Listen, Jerome, forget Gert Pinkowitz for all of two seconds. Because your father requires your utmost attention. Cutie fellow, will you give me your very utmost? Because it is time for your father to go down on his hands and knees to you again and beg you to please in your heart of hearts reconsider.

Jerome, listen to me, where does your father live, which building?

Since years and years ago when he moved down here, has he ever for one instant lived in a different residential?

All right, so what would you call this place — a building like any other building?

Jerome, don't make me have to remind you.

Sweetheart, we are talking the Seavue Spa Oceanfront Garden Arms and Apartments. So do you need reminding which is your father's residential? Because for how many years now have I been telling you, but do you ever listen?

Other children listen, Jerome. The Allen kid, Woody, *he* listens. *Philip* listens, *Saul* listens — and for your information, so does *Bernard*! Believe me, Jerome, everybody in here, they got a kid which they can count on to listen — the Krantzes do and the Plains do, and so do the Sheldons and the Friedmans and the Elkins and the Wallaces and the Segals and the Jaffes and the Barretts and the Bernsteins and the Halberstams! And notice that I am not even mentioning the Robbins family

and their Harold, and the Potoks and their Chaim. You think the Wouks don't have a Herman which listens?

The Mailer people, their Norman *listens*.

The Kordas got a Michael, and *he* listens!

The Apples with their Max, the Michaels people with their Leonard, the Stones with their Irving — every last one of these children is a child which listens!

And did I even get to the Markfields and the Richlers and the Liebowitzes? Ozick, you think this is a girl which doesn't listen? The Charyns, you heard of the Charyns? So they also got a child which listens — and his name is *Jerome*, not no J., into the bargain!

Jerome darling, I didn't even begin to scratch the surface yet of who's who in the Seavue Spa Oceanfront Garden Arms and Apartments! But answer me, is there a single solitary one of them which doesn't have a relation in the literature business? And exclusive of the exception of your father and Mrs. Pinkowitz, tell me if it's not a kid which doesn't take to heart what you say to him and *listens*!

In the whole building, they all got what to listen to them — all except your father and Gert Pinkowitz, all except her with her Thomas and me with my J.D., the two big geniuses which wouldn't listen!

And look at who I didn't even discuss yet — not to mention the Millers and the Hellers and the Ephrons and the Kosinskis! Do the Paleys have a Grace? So tell me, Jerome, does the girl listen?

The Olsens got a Tillie, and the Golds got a Herbert, and the Uris family, they got there a wonderful, sweet-natured boy, a Leon — but what else do they have which your own father doesn't have?

I will answer you in words of one syllable, Jerome. Because the answer is *a child which listens*!



Jerome darling, your father is hoarse from screaming. Even though your father is writing and not talking, Jerome — I promise you, your father has just lost his voice from the screaming. So call the Justice Department, your father had to shout. Because to make himself heard with you, who could talk like a civilized person?

Darling, sonny darling, lean close, open your ears up wide, I couldn't speak no more above a whisper.

So who is in the penthouse here when it used to be your father who was up there? And you know the answer why?

Because they got a child which listens! And you know what, Jerome? His name's not no W. Allen neither!

But far be it from me your father to pass comment. After all, your father is only your father, Jerome. He is only the person which has to live here with these people and answer to them. He is only the person which has to face these people day in and day out because in his particular area code you don't get away with saying to the whole wide world, "Go take a walk."

Jerrychik, sweetie boy, is it asking too much for you to look into your heart of hearts and try to see what is going on down here from your father's side of the standpoint? Do I live in the Seavue Spa Oceanfront Garden Arms and Apartments or do I live in the woods in a tree? And in this residential, Jerome, we're talking from one floor to the next what? Are we talking people which got kids in cloaks and suits, or are we talking people which got kids in books?

The works, Jerome—the cream of the crop of the literature business is right here in this very building, and I want to remind you that it is your father, and not you, which has to live with them!

But did you ever stop to think, "For my father, considering that he is a person of his age and his years, I, Jerome David, am going to ask myself what is it like to live in a set-up where everybody's got somebody in the business?"

Darling, your father will put two and two together for you and answer you with one word. Are you ready for this?

C-O-M-P-A-R-I-S-O-N-S.

Comparisons, Jerome. Notice, like *privacy*, your father can also spell this one too. And, believe me, it comes out the opposite of GET LOST.

So you are not a genius in your own right and I got to draw for you a diagram? You need me to write down for you Saul this and Saul that, Phillie this and Phillie that — not to mention Woody, Woody, Woody morning, noon, and night?

You could live to be a thousand, Jerome, you still wouldn't see any let-up. But meanwhile does your father ever get to get a word in? Does he have Jerome this and Jerome that the way he used to have in the old days when guess who lived in the penthouse? But God forbid the facts of life

should be brought to your attention. So stick a spear in me and break it off in my ribs because your father has the nerve to plead with you for your attention when it is the facts of life which is the subject on the table. Boychik, you know what it means where it says the facts of life? It means somebody has to live with them. So just for argument's sake, darling, between the two of us, guess which one got elected to do it!



Listen, in 603, let's not kid ourselves, so it's no big deal to walk around with two initials. Even three or four, maybe up there in your area code they still wouldn't look at you cross-eyed. But in 305, Jerome, I hope I don't have to tell you, they find out you got a kid who calls himself J.D., you couldn't live long enough, you'll never hear the end of it. Meanwhile, who's complaining? Believe me, I know I got plenty to be grateful for. Because when you hear what Gert Pinkowitz has got with *her* kid, you'll see why your father is only too happy and glad to sit down and count his blessings.

But you'll promise me, boychik, you'll reconsider? Because this is all your father asks of you, two whole seconds of heartfelt reconsideration. Darling, I am down on my hands and knees to you asking. God forbid in all my life I should ever ask again. Please, darling, if you hear me even thinking to ask, you'll run out and get railroad spikes and hammer them into my shins. But meanwhile, for all of two seconds, Jerome, I am begging you to sit down with yourself and like a civilized person you will go into conference with your heart of hearts and you will say to yourself, "For my father's sake, who would let me hammer even rusty railroad spikes into his shins for me, I, Jerome David, am going to think this question over and change my spiteful ways."

Cutie sonny, what your father is asking you can ask anybody and they will tell you it is not too much to ask. Look, you'll let your better judgment be your guide — and whatever you decide in your mind, just remember that your father knows you will be a good boy and come to your senses and decide the right thing. And if I ever utter one more word in this department, may I inherit the Waldorf-Astoria and drop dead in every room.



By the bye, sweetheart, you'll never guess what the Roth woman said to me last week. Because when she said it to me, right away your father said to himself, "I can't wait to tell the sonny boy what this woman is saying

to me, please God he will go along with his father's thinking and realize that you never know where wisdom is going to come from next." So here is the quote. Jerrychik, you'll listen closely and you'll tell me what you think of this quotation. She said, "Mr. Ess, tell me, did you ever stop to realize that when he stood up and had to swear on a stack of Bibles, they said to him, 'Do you, Dwight David Eisenhower,' and so on and so forth? But pay attention, they didn't say to the man no D.D."

Darling, you can't argue with what the woman said. Believe me, I myself stood there and said to myself, "You know, Sol, this woman is speaking the truth — it's right there in the history books in black and white."

Believe me, Jerome, this is wisdom. So whatever the source, I say you've got to hand it to the woman, she spoke wisdom pure and simple, and you don't look a gift horse in the eyes. But if you couldn't bear to hear it, Jerome, if even history isn't good enough for you, then tell them to come down here and take my shoes off and make your father jump on broken glass. All right, I grant you, you didn't decide yet in your own mind that you want them to swear you in as the president of the United States. This your father grants you, this much your father acknowledges. But the principle is still the same thing, Jerome — don't kid yourself, it is still the same principle.

Cutie fellow, sweetie fellow, boychikeleh mine, go back to the gorgeous name your father gave you and you wouldn't have to hold your breath for the world to be your oyster all over again. This is my written guarantee to you, Jerome. Get rid of this J.D. thing, and I promise you, you'll feel like a brand-new person. And don't think that in two seconds everybody won't notice. Before you know it, they'll all be singing your praises just the way they used to, the whole gang of them in the literature business, not to mention their families and relations. Believe me, darling, they'll all be saying to themselves, "God love him, he's some terrific kid, that kid, look how he did the right thing and made his father happy."

Pay attention, boychik, they are definitely not no dummies, these kids that also went with you into the literature business. And even if there's plenty of them your father looks at and has to say to himself, "That one there, to tell you the truth, I don't see what they see in him," even the worst of them your father can tell you they still got a head on their shoulders and are only too willing to take off their hat to a person which does the right thing when it's a question of his father's wishes. Are you listening to me, sweetheart? They'll hear what you did, and even the

Allen kid will step aside and tell you to go back up to the top of the heap again. All it takes is for you to show them you made up your mind to be a serious person with a serious name that makes sense to decent people.

Your father is speaking to you without favoritism, Jerome. Your father is speaking to you the way a Solomon would speak to you if the man was alive to tell you himself. Your father does not play favorites, Jerome. Believe me, your father does not give you one shred of credit you don't deserve. So when he tells you all you got to do is go back to being Jerome David again, your father is giving you his honest appraisal. Darling, please, give me some credit for intelligence! Your father doesn't give a person his honest appraisal until he's weighed all of the whys and wherefores. Phillie, Saul, Bernie, and the rest of them, they'll hear what you did and they wouldn't be able to get out of your way fast enough. Are you listening, Jerome? Because I am taking into consideration not just exclusively these youngsters and the Allen kid but also your other top people in this building, which if you look up on 16 just under the penthouse, you're talking the Robbins family and the Krantz family and the Sheldons. But meanwhile ask yourself, darling, in the case of the aforementioned, is it S. or is it Sidney? Is it J. or is it Judith? And Harold, you could ask anybody, it's Harold!

You see what your father is saying to you, boychik? So do me a favor and don't make me repeat myself. Tomorrow morning, first thing, it's a clean slate, okay? Believe me, your father can hear them already, it's such a shout in my hart, it's such music in my ears. "Say hello, everybody, to Solly's terrific cutie guy, Jerome David, a new person!"

And another thing, darling — don't kid yourself, the King of Sweden is no dumbbell neither. Ask anyone. You ask anyone, Jerrychik, they'll be only too happy and glad to tell you the King of Sweden didn't just get off the boat. Go ahead, ask anyone, and they'll tell you the man is paying very close attention to who writes down his name on his book like there's something in it he is proud of and who puts down a name like the whole deal from start to finish was just a lick and a promise. Believe me, the King of Sweden comes along and sees a thing like just J.D., you think the man can't draw his own conclusions? Cutie guy, you could cut out my tongue for telling you — but your father didn't have to go to college to know the King of Sweden has got eyes in his head, the man could add up two and two. So the man sees where it says you didn't have the heart to put your whole name down, just don't be surprised when he says to himself, "This one here, he's not fooling no King of Sweden nohow!"

But don't look at *me*, Jerome. I promise you, the King of Sweden can see for himself. I told you, I your father did not make the rules, not even the ones which is secondary.

/ / /

So tell me, sweetheart, the plots I sent you last time, did any of them work out for you? So if in your opinion nothing looked good to you, don't worry, I already got a couple a dozen new ones from keeping my eyes and ears wide open in the card room. Listen, in just my regular Wednesday game there's Charlie Heller, Mort Segal, and Artie Elkin, and between the four of us, believe me, we could fill a whole library from top to bottom. By the bye, darling, I want you to guess what Mortie said to your father only two days ago. Because as God is my witness, Jerome, the man said to me, "Sol, do the child a favor and tell him to get rid of it. My Eric, for instance, he *added*, he didn't take away. So the boy wants a little flourish, a little trim, he *adds* a letter and gets Erich, whereas he meanwhile doesn't let three perfectly good letters go altogether to waste." So Mortie says, "Go tell your kid he could add a thing maybe, like a little trim over an *e*, whereas David he could make Davidorf — it's up to him. But the principle is you *add*, Sol, you don't take away."

Sonny, to tell you the truth, your father in his own mind never thought of this before. So for what it's worth, boychik, I your father am passing along to you a mere possibility, you don't have to hurry up and make a decision. But to your father's way of thinking, the name Jerome with a little trim on top of it is definitely not the worst idea in the world. So who knows, the King of Sweden might even get a kick out of it. Because if you ask me, the man must have looked at the name Saul and he said to himself, "This here is a name which looks a little skimpy to me, a little fixing up here and there couldn't hurt it. But meanwhile I don't have to put up with just an S. Meanwhile you can see this Saul has got his heart in the right place."

Darling, the upshot of this I don't have to remind you. A medal! Thousands and thousands of dollars and a medal!!

Be smart, Jerome. Listen to what Mort Segal says. You *add*, you don't take *away*. Believe me, maybe the man's got nothing but an Erich, but he knows whereof he speaks.

Which reminds me, sweetie boy — before I get to the subject of your father and his new excitement in life, it just this instant dawned on me to tell you that I noticed it's another year but what's what with you and Merv Griffin? Cutie fellow, if I have said it to you once, I have said it to you a

million times, no business and no pictures is bad enough — but no Merv Griffin you definitely can't get away with!

You know what you are, Jerome?

Because the answer is you are your own worst enemy!

All right, no pictures is a fact of life your father is learning to live with. So forget pictures. You don't want to have a picture, then don't have a picture. So maybe a genius doesn't have to have a picture. Only a handful of days ago I said to Murray Mailer, I said, "Murray, believe me, when you are a genius in your own right, then you will know you don't need a picture." I said to the man, "Listen, Murray, I myself am not questioning if your Norman is a genius. I am just saying if you are one, then you know you could live without pictures."

Jerome, I wouldn't even begin to tell you what the man said to me. But at the Seavue, do they ever give you the least little consideration? Jerome, the man stands there and he says to me, "Sol, this fella Einstein, like with the hair and the sweater and the pop-eyes? The man wasn't a genius? So tell me, Sol, how come you know what I'm talking about? You met him? You sat down to a meal with the man and broke bread with him? You saw a *picture* — wherever you looked, you saw a *picture*. But pardon me, my friend, I forgot — your kid with the initials is a bigger genius."

So please God Murray Mailer should live and be well, Jerome, but from him, I guarantee you, your father does not need a history lesson. Meanwhile, I say you cannot discount the man totally. Believe me, darling, in this world, whatever the source, a person tells you something you never heard before, then you got to sit down and think it over and give that person credit. So it's the truth, darling, and in my own mind I never stopped to think about it before. But am I ashamed to admit it? So all right, Einstein was a big genius, the biggest — but even him, the biggest genius, he had a picture here, a picture there, pictures, pictures, pictures.

Believe me, sonny boy, I as your father am not holding Murray Mailer up to you. But meanwhile the man knows wherefrom he speaks.

Sweetheart, I want to speak to you as your own father, an individual who does not play favorites. Jerome, you know what? You got on you a face like an angel! Do you hear me, Jerome? An angel!

But if a picture is for you such a trial and tribulation, then I say forget it, darling, you don't have to knock yourself out for no Murray Mailer's benefit, not to mention the millions and millions of fans who would get down on their hands and knees to you to thank you for one single solitary exception.



Believe me, Jerome, I am washing my hands of the whole subject. You don't want a picture? Then don't have a picture! On the one hand no picture, and on the other hand a name like J.D. when that's not a name which makes any sense to anybody down here, these are things that are killing your father, but he never said he couldn't learn to live with them. Whereas the question of no Merv Griffin, Jerome, *this*, for your information, is a whole different question altogether!

Jerome darling, answer me this. Do I have to tell you what goes on down here when it's four o'clock in the afternoon at the Seavue Spa Oceanfront Garden Arms and Apartments? Answer me, Jerome, I didn't tell you enough times already?

Jerome, it is four o'clock, and where is everybody suddenly running? From the card rooms, from the pool, from everywhere in sight, where are all these hotshots in such a hurry to get to?

Because the answer, Jerome, is Merv Griffin!

You don't believe me, go take a look in their apartments. You could look for yourself if you wouldn't take your father's own word for it. Four o'clock, where are they? They're looking to see who's the lucky family who's got his child on with Merv today and who's the poor schnooks which doesn't!

So stop to think, Jerome — did your father ever once have the pleasure?

But far be it from me to utter one word when it comes to your own father's peace of mind and happiness. Believe me, Jerome, first and foremost, your father is not an individual who asks for himself. So think Jerome — if not for myself, then who am I asking for?

Darling, please, do me a favor — go into conference with your heart of hearts and ask yourself how you could ask your father such a question when you already know the answer. I promise you, when you know, you know, and you do not require a father to sit down and draw you a diagram. Like the woman who hears the telephone and she goes to pick it up. Did I tell you about this, Jerome? This woman, she goes to pick it up and she says, "Hello?" Just like any normal, civilized person, Jerome, the woman says, "Hello?"

So there's a man there on the other end, Jerome, and I want you to hear what this man says to this woman — because, as God is my judge, he says to her, "I know what your name is and I know where you live and I know you can't wait for me to come over there and tear off every stitch

you got on you and throw you down on the floor and do to you every filthy dirty thing I can think of.”

You heard this man, Jerome? You heard what this man said to this woman? But now I want you to hear how this woman answers him. Because this is what she says to him, darling — she says, “So you know all this from just hello?”

Jerome, did you hear every word that woman said to that man?

So do me a favor, darling, and don’t ask your father any questions when the answer is something you already know.

Sweetheart, I am going to give you some quotes that will interest you — word-for-word verbatim.

Gus Krantz: “So, Mr. Ess, you tell me your little one is too *sensitive* for Merv Griffin, he couldn’t go on there and make a little *intelligent* conversation? Tsk, tsk, Mr. Ess, we all *understand*, believe me. When a child is too *sensitive*, who is it it’s always a *tragedy* for? Believe me, Mr. Ess, my heart goes out to you, because for the father it’s *really* a tragedy. A mother, she could maybe *live* with it, but a *father*?”

Burt Bellow: “With my own eyes I noticed, Mr. Ess, maybe J.D. stands for a girl and she wants to keep it a secret? Listen, you tell your daughter to talk to Merv, the man will figure out an angle. Meanwhile, God love her, ask her if she heard about my Saul, a medal and thousands and thousands of dollars.”

Cutie guy, don’t excite yourself. So there are worse quotes than the ones I just told you, but does your father even listen? I promise you, I hear it, and it goes in one ear and out the other.

Who listens to these people with their Merv Griffins and their Merv Griffins!

But meanwhile it is the principle of the thing which to I as your father is interesting. And, Jerome, in case you didn’t already figure it out for yourself, the principle is it is either Merv Griffin or forget it!

Granted, for years in memoriam I tried to shield you with my own body. Granted, what your father has had to go through for you a million fathers couldn’t go through. And I also grant you it’s still not half of what this woman Gert has got with her high and mighty Thomas. But, Jerome, darling, be a nice boy and make an exception. So what’s the big pro-

duction? You'll pick up the telephone and you'll call the man and you'll say to Merv you thought it over in your mind and you are ready to make an appearance.

Boychik, would your father begin to ask you if he saw the slightest alternative? So tell them to strap me down and turn on the electricity, your father is asking for your own benefit!

Sonny sweetie, they could go ahead and give me all the volts they got, but your father still wouldn't hesitate to tell you all it takes is a little intelligence even when a person is a genius. But does this mean that to his dying day you haven't got your father's vote? Jerrychik darling, your father will go right down the line with you to his last breath regardless. Meanwhile, ask yourself, is it fair that you who are the child should never meet your father halfway — when he is your father and your elder and would die for you if this is what you demanded? So answer me, for your own father you couldn't sit down with Merv for all of two seconds and make a little civilized conversation? Bing bang and it's over and done with, you can pick yourself up and go back to your 603 and meanwhile your father in his mind could go to his grave in peace and quiet and contentment. Because I want to ask you a question, Jerome. Tell me, so how do you propose I'm supposed to answer these people year in and year out when they come down the next day to the card room and they say to me "Tsk, tsk, Mr. Ess, we watched and watched but we didn't see no J.D. on Merv Griffin"?



You want another quote, Jerome? I tried to shield you with my own body, darling, but you want another one?

Okay, here is one from Artie Elkin.

"Tell me the truth, Solly, it was a cut-rate nose-job and the girl couldn't ever again show her face in public? Listen, my Stanley is very close to certain very big doctors. You want me to give him a call and see what maybe could be done for her if you know the right people?"

Jerrychik, this is what your father has to live with, quotes like this morning, noon, and night. Whereas one word from you, and it's a whole new ballgame. Pay attention, Jerome — you'll call up and say, "Merv, look, I haven't got all day — the answer is yes, so when do you want me?"

So you'll tell them to kill me and bury me alive under boulders, Jerome, but first you'll do this for your father. Because I am here to tell

you, boychik, maybe Gert Pinkowitz is made of iron, but your father definitely isn't.

So the Everest Mountain should fall over on me for remarking, but when they put your father together, darling, they made a mistake and used flesh and blood.

Do you hear me, Jerome? I couldn't take it anymore, every weekday all my life no Merv Griffin and meanwhile your father keeps watching and waiting, please God his sonny boy will get some sense in his head and some day see the light!

You want me to quote you Artie Elkin again? Because what the man said to me only this morning you wouldn't believe it unless you heard it for yourself — so I want you to hear this, Jerome, because, believe me, you'll appreciate. Are you listening? The man said to me: "Sol, did I miss your J.D. or didn't I? Four-thirty, four-forty, was she on there or wasn't she? Because maybe I left the room at the inopportune point of departure when I had to go see a man about a dog in the toilet. So was she or wasn't she? Even with the nose, maybe the girl took her chances? So tell me, Sol, what is the terrible verdict?"

Pussycat, what will it cost you to pick up the phone and tell Merv you'll make an exception? As your father, am I or am I not entitled to a civilized answer?

Enough privacy for two seconds, Jerome. It wouldn't kill you! It's only Merv Griffin!

Jerome, I have to whisper again, I'm so hoarse from all this screaming. Darling, pay attention, we are talking about a wholesome show for the entire American family. So did you hear me? Please, you'll sit down with the man, you'll say hello and goodbye, take a look at my face — and then you'll get up and walk away on your own two feet, and I promise you, you'll thank me for every minute of it, and so will all of your fans from coast to coast in every direction.

Okay, so you don't have to give your father your answer this very instant.

You need to think it over in your mind, then go ahead and think it over in your mind. So in the morning, your decision will be your decision, and you'll call Merv and advise the man accordingly. And don't forget to tell him to send you a round-trip ticket.

You know what, Jerome? Tonight, after I finish this letter, when your father finally puts his head on the pillow and says his prayers, I am going to thank God that with regard to the simple question of Merv Griffin my

sonny boy and I have had a meeting of the minds and the subject is all settled. And I promise you, I wouldn't even say boo to Artie Elkin and the rest of them beforehand. The gang of them should only be looking and not be ready for it when you walk out and Merv says, "Ladies and gentlemen, have I got for you the cream of the crop of the literature business!"

Jerome, I'll tell you something which just between you and your father will be our little secret. Artie and the rest of them, who wishes these gangsters ill? But when a certain person walks out and sits himself down to converse with Merv, every hoodlum in this building will drop dead! From one floor to the next, right up to the penthouse, all the big-shots will grab their kishkes and keel over. And you know what? Your father wouldn't blame them.

So call the Chinese Army and tell them to come and stick knitting needles under your father's fingernails, but this is what I am telling you. Even up in the penthouse with their Woody, they'll have to get the undertaker!



So the plots, Jerome, tell me, did you see anything there? Because since you're going on Merv, it couldn't hurt to ask the man what he thinks of this here plot as against that one. Believe me, Jerome, the man knows. The man didn't just get off the boat, darling. Pay attention to your father — you ask Merv an intelligent question, he'll be only too happy and glad to give you the benefit of his wisdom.

The man knows the business, Jerome. Are you listening to me? Believe me, the man didn't get where he is giving bad advice. Listen, Jerrychik, you open your heart of hearts to Merv and, I promise you, you won't be sorry. The man knows whereof he speaks. Besides, does it ever hurt to ask? You'll show him the plots I sent you and then you'll sit down with him and you'll listen to him and you'll see what the man thinks. And meanwhile whichever ones he says to you, "Jerome David, these are the ones I want you to get rid of," don't forget to send them back to me, and your father will be a sport and make a present of them to Gert Pinkowitz.

Who knows, maybe God will make a miracle and the woman could get somewhere with one of them with her own kid.

Sweetheart, I didn't tell you yet what the story is in that department, did I? Believe me, I know you got a lot on your mind. Just getting ready to go back to your old name and go on Merv, I realize that this is plenty

for the current agenda. But meanwhile, Jerome, when someone comes along who is suffering worse than you are, then you should always sit yourself down with that person and listen to their story—because I'll tell you something, you never know what you could learn from it. Like the furrier who calls up his travel agent and he says to him, "Look, I'm sick to death of the usuals, give me what you got in the way of the Joneses couldn't keep up with it," and the travel agent says to him, "Well, what do you say to a couple of weeks on a slave ship?" So the man says, "A slave ship? What's a slave ship?"

Jerome, the travel agent answers him like this—he says to the man, "A slave ship, a galley ship—you never heard of a galley ship?" And the man says, "Sure, I heard of a galley ship. Next time you're talking a galley ship, *say* a galley ship. So tell me, this season the right people are cruising on a galley ship? Then book me a galley ship, first-class."

So the next thing you know, Jerome, it's time to go get aboard, and the man and his wife of forty years go down there, and they get on board, and it's gorgeous.

Darling, your father is here to tell you, this was some gorgeous ship this man and his wife got on! Service like this you never saw in your life. Hand and foot, they couldn't wait on you fast enough. So the man and his wife, they're in there in their stateroom and it's so gorgeous they can't believe it—when meanwhile here comes this terrible knocking on the door. And who is it, Jerome? Because I am here to tell you, it's this individual maybe seven feet tall, and he says to the man, "You Goldbaum?" So Goldbaum looks at him, seven feet tall, naked all over, these muscles, Jerome, such muscles. So Goldbaum looks and he winks and he says, "I'm Goldbaum."

Well, darling, this big naked man says to Goldbaum, "If you're Goldbaum, then it says here it's your turn at the oars." Do you hear this, Jerome, the *oars*? And the fellow is looking at this list he's got and he says, "Nathan Goldbaum, right?" So Goldbaum says to the man, "Oars?"

Jerome, this is when the big naked man gives Goldbaum a grab and pulls him out into the hall and he says to Goldbaum, "Fucking right, oars!"

Jerome, would you believe this? In all your born days, would you believe with your own ears what is happening here? Because they take Goldbaum down there into the bottom of the ship and they tear off the clothes he's got on his back and then they put these chains on his legs and they make him sit down and with all the other men he's got to pull on

these oars until the ship is rowed all the way out of New York Harbor! But this is nothing, Jerome, nothing! Because meanwhile there's all these big fellows walking around and they're hitting Goldbaum and the rest of them such smacks. With whips!

Whips, Jerome!

Well, I don't have to tell you, it takes maybe two, three days to row out there — and in all this time, darling, did Goldbaum get one drink of water? Forget water! Not even a piece of *fruit*, Jerome. Hitting with whips, *this* is what Goldbaum and the rest of them got!

Meanwhile, okay, they get the ship rowed out there and the big fellow comes over and he gets the chains off Goldbaum and he has to pick him up and *carry* the man, this is the condition which Goldbaum is in!

But listen, darling, even in this condition, like a dead man, I want you to ask yourself what Goldbaum is thinking to himself when the big fellow is carrying him back to his stateroom like a rag.

Jerome darling, do you want me to answer you?

The man is *starved*, Jerome, the man is dying of *thirst*! And *bleeding*! Believe me, I don't have to describe to you the blood, it would make you sick if I told you just the half of it, how much blood Goldbaum already bled all over himself.

But meanwhile, Jerome, what is Goldbaum *thinking*?

Jerome darling, I want you to hear this. Because even in his condition, God love him, Goldbaum is thinking to himself, "So what do you tip a fella like this?"

Did you hear this, Jerrychik? "What do you tip a fella like this?" Did you hear every word of what Goldbaum is thinking?

So this is why I say to you, darling, it never hurts to listen to the other person's pain and suffering. Believe me, Jerome, whatever the source, you could always learn something when you pay attention to the other fellow's aggravation. Even from Merv Griffin, you could learn, for instance. Because don't think the man hasn't been through plenty in his own right.

But on this earth, darling, even taking into account your own personal father, there is *nobody* what got the heartache and aggravation that you could even begin to compare with the heartache and aggravation of Gert Pinkowitz.



Look to the child, Jerome. This is what your father says to you, look to

the child. Because if you want to see what is killing a mother or father, don't look for a truck, don't look for a bus — unless you know it's the child which is driving it.

But listen, would you ever hear one word of bitterness from the woman's own lips?

A *saint*, Jerome — the woman is a living saint! Believe me, kiddo, every last word I your father had to pry out of her because wild horses couldn't get this woman to talk and tell you what's what with her high and mighty Thomas.

You know what, darling? In my personal opinion, the entire human race should get together and take off their hat to this wonderful creature.

And I'll tell you something else, boychik. Thank God this is a person made of iron. Of *iron*! Because with flesh and blood you couldn't live with what this woman's got to live with. I as your father look at this creature and I say to myself, "Sol, even with the agony you are suffering at your own child's hands, this is nothing when you stop to compare it to the agony of a person like Gert Pinkowitz!"

This is what your father says to himself, Jerome. Every time I even *look* at the woman, this is what your father in his own mind has to say to himself.

On the other hand, who could overlook the similarities? I mean, when I look at what this woman has her hands full with, you think I don't say to myself, "Sol, when you consider your own heartache and aggravation, you don't notice the terrific similarities?"

Jerome, believe me, darling, whoever said it's a small world, the same person could go ahead and say it a thousand times and he still wouldn't be saying it enough.

Number one, Gert tells me her Tommy is a brilliant boy. So even if I am in no position to pass judgment, let's give the woman credit. Like my own Jerrychik, Gert's Thomas is another genius, this much I am willing to acknowledge even if the Robbins woman, who has her own Harold, says to your father she's read the Pinkowitz boy's books and every word in all three of them she could take it or leave it.

Okay, so it's a free country, the Robbins woman is entitled to her own personal opinion, maybe the woman knows whereof she speaks. But meanwhile, so long as Gert Pinkowitz tells me the child is a genius, then the child is a genius — even if Dora Robbins wants to look your father in the face and maintain to the contrary.

But, Jerome, I ask you, when did the boy last do a little business?

Because the answer is don't ask. Not for seasons and seasons. So listen, maybe in your lifetime you ran across another individual where this particular situation is the case?

Meanwhile, what's the next thing?

No *pictures*, darling! Just like with somebody else your father happens to be acquainted with, no pictures, not even a snapshot in the newspapers — plus no Merv Griffin, no Merv Griffin neither!

But wait a minute, Jerome, wait a minute, the similarities I'm not even finished with yet. Listen. Because is the name which the boy's mother sat down and gave him good enough for this ungrateful child? Like somebody else who is associated with your own father's personal acquaintance, is it?

Only *worse* than you, Jerome. Worse!

Believe me, worse isn't even the half of it. Because with you, darling, maybe there is a certain degree of rhyme or reason. But with the Pinkowitz kid? With him we're talking a whole different ballgame altogether. With him we're talking it's all the way out of the whole total picture!

Myself, boychik, when I heard it, when the woman is on the premises only an hour already, you could have blown your father over with a feather. The woman does not even have one stick of furniture moved in yet! Do you hear me, Jerome? Not one stick! But meanwhile this is how heartsick she is — the woman is so heartsick she's got to say to the moving man she's sorry but not for another instant could she stand the strain and the aggravation, would he please leave everything sit while she goes and sees who her new neighbor is and gets this off her chest. And do you know *why*, darling? Because if the woman does not talk to somebody in the next two seconds, then she is going to have to scream or take a pill. And meanwhile I don't have to tell you a pill she can't take since so far they didn't unpack the first thing yet, not even the box with her emergencies.



Jerome, I know I don't have to draw you a diagram, it is I your father who is the individual next door.

This is how small the world is, Jerome — you turn around and the next thing you know you are the person next door!

Sweetie guy, you could go ahead and send hoodlums. They could bring brass knuckles down here to get me with, but your father wants you to know one thing. In this world, Jerrychik, even if you couldn't believe

it, there are worse things than what you did to your name when you made it J.D., which, by the way, even President Eisenhower himself didn't think was such a hot idea — but, all right, go ahead and look up the history on it for yourself.

I promise you, boychik, you go listen to Gert Pinkowitz with her Thomas, you'll hear and you'll hear plenty — a child which comes into this world with such a gorgeous name and then has the gall to turn around and change it the instant they come along and say to the boy, "Pinkowitz?"

All right, so the child wanted to make a good impression. So, darling, your father will tell you what happens when all you can think of is making a good impression. Because if you remember Goldbaum, then you'll know who your father is talking about when I tell you the man's son comes home with a *blonde*.

A *blonde*, Jerome, as your father lives and breathes, the man's son comes home with a *blonde*.

But meanwhile Goldbaum couldn't learn to live with it? And also his wife of forty years couldn't learn to do likewise?

So they make a meal, Jerome. Are you listening to me, darling? Mrs. Goldbaum, God love her, she makes a meal. And right off to begin with she puts soup on the table. And the blonde, Jerome, the blonde who only wants in her heart of hearts to make a good impression, she says, "Oh, God, is this soup wonderful, is this delicious soup, never in my life did I have such a bowl of soup!"

This is what the girl says, Jerome. So are you listening? The blonde says, "This soup, such a wonderful soup — so tell me, everybody, what is it, what is it?"

Darling, Mrs. Goldbaum shouldn't answer the girl?

Believe me, Jerome, Mrs. Goldbaum you never met maybe, but let me tell you that this is a civilized person.

So to make a long story short, she says to the blonde, "Matzoh ball soup, we call it matzoh ball soup."

Darling, verbatim, this is how Mrs. Goldbaum answers.

But the blonde, Jerome, are you remembering *her*? This blonde which in her heart of hearts only wants to make on these people a good impression? Because I want you to hear what she says as a consequence of she only has the best of intentions.

You're listening, sweetie boy? Was your father born yesterday because he's taking it for granted you are listening? Because this blonde which I am referring to, this is what the girl says to Mrs. Goldbaum, and I am quoting you, sweetheart, every single *word*. She

says, "Holy Mother of God, it sure turns out better than when they make it from the matzoh's shoulder."



Good impressions, Jerome — this is the aggravation they give everybody. But Mrs. Pinkowitz's Tommy, all the child can think of is how to make a good impression. And forget just a T. for Thomas. *Worse*, I'm telling you. Worse by a long shot.

Believe me, Jerome, the sin you did to your name the instant your father's back was turned, it's nothing by comparison. Even the woman herself would tell you if you asked her. Because I your father asked her, and she answered me, "Solly, Solly, what your child did to you when he made it J.D., take my word for it, it's a blessing by comparison. A blessing, Solly, a blessing!"

Cutie fellow, it should only fly from your father's lips to God's two ears when I say to you in all honesty, "The nerve of some children!"

Okay, so send bullies to knock me down and steal my last red nickel, but your father, Jerome, is no stranger to what a child can do to a parent. So my heart shouldn't go out to this woman who's got a Thomas just like I've got a Jerome, only worse if you could actually believe it?

Darling, the woman has *tears* in her eyes when she says to me, "Solly, sit down, dearheart, because I want you to get yourself ready for the shock of the century."

Sonny boy, I am telling you they could have come in here and blown your father over with a feather when the woman told me what she told me. To take a gorgeous name like Pinkowitz and get cute with it? What kind of a child is it which does a thing like this? So if the boy had to have two syllables, what's so wrong with Pincus? But Pynchon, darling, this is a name which makes no sense from every angle!

So whoever heard of a name like Pynchon?

Tell me, Jerome, this is a name for a serious person? Believe me, darling, your father is willing to learn. There's an area code somewhere with a name like that they wouldn't all look at you sideways?

So the child could take Thomas and put a little trim on the top of it and also make a good impression!



This is why I say to you, Jerome, you have to give comfort where comfort is due. But I promise you, boychik, in this case it's a pleasure, the woman

is a living doll, so svelte it would break your heart. And meanwhile, I promise you it's no trouble. I hear the creature crying her eyes out, it's such an effort to run next door? So maybe that's where I was if you called last night and your father wasn't here to pick up.

So you called, darling? Tell me, you really called?

You know what, Jerome? I say you used the brains God gave you and you waited for when they knock the rates down and it wouldn't cost you no arm and a leg just to say hello and Happy High Holy Days to your father.

Tell me, sweetheart, did I guess the right answer?

Save your breath, I guessed.

Listen, you think a father does not know a son?

Don't worry, boychik, when all is said and done, a father knows a son — even with no pictures and a name he could never warm up to. But Merv, Jerome, Merv you promised me you'll get busy and take care of. Because I'll tell you something, darling. If you will pay attention to me with both ears, your father will let you in on a big secret.

You remember when years and years ago you sat yourself down and you wrote about this woman who's so fat and all day long she sits on her porch and listens to the radio? Darling, I'm going back years now, but do you remember? So because this creature was so lonely and also dying and so forth, it was you yourself which said, please God, the people on the radio should all get together and do for her their utmost, since what's the woman got in the whole wide world except the people which talk on the radio?

Sweetheart, sonny boy, I don't have to tell you it was you yourself which said this with your own two lips. So don't make a federal case, Jerome — the difference is your father got a *television*. Are you saying to me it's not the same principle?

Please, darling, for your father, and so please God you wouldn't have to contradict yourself, be a sport and go on Merv Griffin.

But if it is so important to you that it has to be a fat woman which is listening, and if your own father's suffering is not enough for you, Jerome, then do it for Gert, darling, do it for Gert.

So all right, Gert Pinkowitz is *not* so svelte! So your father told a little fib, send G-men and put him in a prison.

The creature is *dieting*, Jerome, did you hear me? Dieting! So between you and me, did she get anywhere yet? So sue me, the woman's not skinny!

I'm telling you, darling, this woman is so fat it would break your heart just to look at her — and all I got to say is thank God 305 is her area code and you'll never have to see.

Boychik, are you listening? So you're already the most wonderful son in the whole wide world, no arguments. Your father admits it, there never was a better boy. Now go be an angel on top of it, Jerome — for a woman who is fat and is in agony and is also a saint, tell Merv Griffin here you come for Mrs. Gertrude Pinkowitz.

Love and kisses
from your adoring father,
and also Happy High Holidays!

↑ ↑ ↑

P.S. Did I tell you about Goldbaum is passing away? The same Goldbaum which went on the slave ship, Jerome, the man who has the son with the *blonde*? So he's on his deathbed, and it's goodbye and good luck, I didn't tell you already?

But all right, Goldbaum's an old man, he's got no complaints, that's it and that's it. So did I tell you, Jerome? Because I want you to hear with your own two ears what happens next when the man says to his son which is sitting with him, "Kiddo, you've been a wonderful kid, from you in my whole life long your father has never had nothing but absolute joyousness, so goodbye and good luck and here is a kiss."

And the boy, Jerome, he says to Goldbaum, "Well, you have been a great pop, Daddy, and we'll miss you a lot." And Goldbaum answers him, he says to his son, "Forget it, when that's it, that's it, and it's time to call it quits."

So this is when the man shuts his eyes and lays back down again, he's ready to pass away. But then the next thing you know Goldbaum opens up his eyes and he's giving the air these little sniffs.

Are you paying attention, Jerome? The man is sitting up, and with his nose up in the air he's going like this, darling — sniff, sniff. So then he says, "Tell me, sweetheart, is Mama in the kitchen?"

And the boy answers him, he says to Goldbaum, "Mama is in the kitchen, she's making chopped liver in the kitchen."

Do you hear this, Jerome? "Mama is in the kitchen, she's making chopped liver in the kitchen."

So this is when Goldbaum says to him, "Look, darling, you'll be a sweetheart and go into the kitchen and for your father you'll come back

here with a little taste, and please God, I only got a couple of seconds, so you'll hurry."

Jerome, did you hear every word of this? What Goldbaum said to his son, you heard? Because I want you to hear how his son answers the man. Even if you couldn't believe it with your own two ears, your father wants you to hear.

As God is my judge, darling, the man's child says to him, "I can't, Daddy, it's for after."

Did you hear this, Jerome? "It's for after." With these very words the child answers his father, "It's for after."

Jerome? Sweetie boy, are you listening to me? There *is* no after! Now God bless you and let this be a lesson to you.

IN MODERN DRESS

by Craig Raine

A pair of blackbirds
warring in the roses,
one or two poppies

losing their heads,
the trampled lawn
a battlefield of dolls.

Branch by pruned branch,
a child has climbed
the family tree

to queen it over us:
we groundlings search
the flowering cherry

till we find her face,
its pale prerogative
to rule our hearts.

Sir Walter Raleigh
trails his comforter
about the muddy garden,

a full-length Hilliard
in miniature hose
and padded pants.

How rakishly upturned
his fine moustache
of oxtail soup,

foreshadowing, perhaps,
some future time
of altered favour,

stuck in the high chair
like a pillory, features
pelted with food.

So many expeditions
to learn the history
of this little world:

I watch him grub
in the vegetable patch
and ponder the potato

in its natural state
for the very first time,
or found a settlement

of leaves and sticks
cleverly protected
by a circle of stones.

Volume 42, Number 2 Spring 1984

Craig Raine is former poetry editor at Faber & Faber and now teaches at New College, Oxford. This poem was one of six to appear in the same issue.

IT

by Howard Moss

It was a question of whether it couldn't
See you or you see it, that surface
That was more than a surface, crooning its jokes,
Like "Hello, stranger!" and "Sir, you're up!"

And sometimes "Darling, where have you been?"
Cosying back to you in your pajamas,
Slightly sick and wanting you home
To give it hot tea and toast, in bed,

Wanting you there, and I mean always,
Waiting for hours until you'd appear
To give it a little life, some reason for
Existing at all, it would often say,

Watching you shave into a snowy
Newness of flesh, watching you comb
Hair there was less and less of, swearing
"I'll never breathe a word of this to anyone,"

Confessing its hopes only to you:
"Clean me, please. Or dirty me further.
Or break me in two. Or make me whole.
I'll never leave you. Never, never."

Rupert Beersley and the Beggar Master of Sivani-Hoota

BY T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

Volume 43, Number 2 Spring 1985

T. Coraghessan Boyle teaches at the University of Southern California and has published several novels. Other stories by him have appeared in these pages in spring 1978, spring 1983, and fall 1988.

It was on a dark lowering day during one of the interstices of the monsoon that his Highness Yadavindra Singh, Nawab of the remote Deccan state of Sivani-Hoota, began to miss his children. That is, the children began to turn up missing, and to an alarming degree. It began with little Gopal, who had been born with a mottled pale birthmark in the shape of a half moon under the crease of his left buttock. Miss Elspeth Compton-Divot, the children's English governess, whose responsibility it was to instruct her wards in the dead language and living literature of Greece and to keep watch over them as a shepherd keeps watch over his flock (flock, indeed — there were twenty-five sibling Singhs under her care originally), was the first to discover little Gopal's absence. She bowed her way into the Nawab's reception room immediately after lessons on that fateful afternoon with its sky so striped with cloud it might have been flayed, to find the Nawab and his wife, the third Begum, in attendance on several prominent local figures, including Mr.

Bagwas, the rubber goods proprietor, and Mr. Patel, the grain merchant. "Most High, Puissant, Royal and Wise Hegemon Whose Duty it is to Bring the Word of God and the Will of Just Government to the Peoples of Sivani-Hoota and Environs," she began, "I come before you on a matter of gravest import."

The Nawab, a man in his late middle age who had attended Oxford in the days of Pater and was given to ejaculations like "What ho!" and "L'art pour l'art!", told her to stuff the formality and come to the point.

"It's your third youngest, sir — little Gopal."

"Yes?"

"He seems to have disappeared."

The Nawab shifted his bulk uneasily in his chair — for he was a big man, fattened on paan, sweet cream, and chapatis slathered with orange-blossom honey — glanced at his Begum and then expelled a great exasperated puff of air. "What a damnable nuisance," he said. "I don't doubt the little beggar's up to some mischief, hiding himself in the servants' pantry or some such rot. Which one did you say it was?"

"Little Gopal, Sir."

"Gopal?"

It was then that the Begum spoke rapidly to her husband in Tamil and he began almost simultaneously to nod his head, muttering, "Yes, yes, a good boy that. A pity, a real pity."

The governess went on to explain the circumstances of the boy's disappearance — the testimony of the night nurse who'd put him to bed, his elder brother but six's assertion that they'd played together at cribbage before falling off to sleep, her own discovery of little Gopal's absence early that day when she commenced morning lessons by comparing her seating chart with the nearly identical moon-shaped grinning brown faces of the Nawab's brood.

Mr. Bagwas, who had been silently pulling at a clay pipe through all of this, abruptly pronounced a single word: "Leopards."

But it was not leopards. Though the stealthy cats commonly carried off six or seven of the village's children a night, the occasional toothless grandmother and innumerable goats, dogs, cows, fowl, royal turtles, and even the ornamental koi that graced the Nawab's ponds, they were absolved of suspicion in the present case. After Abha, aged seven, and then the eleven-year-old Shanker vanished on successive nights, the Nawab, becoming concerned, called in Mr. Hugh Tureen, game hunter, to put out baits and exterminate the spotted fiends. Though in the course of the ensuing week Mr. Tureen shot some seventy-three leopards, six-

teen tigers, twelve wolves, and several hundred skunks, mongeese, badgers, and the like, the Nawab continued to lose children. Santha, aged nine and with the mark of the dung beetle on the arches of both feet, vanished under the noses of three night nurses and half a dozen watchmen specially employed to stand guard over the nursery. This time, however, there was a clue. Bhupinder, aged six, claimed to have seen a mysterious shrouded figure hanging over his sister's bed, a figure rather like that of an ape on whom a tent has collapsed. Two days later, when the harsh Indian sun poked like a lance into the muslin-hung sanctuary of the children's quarters, Bhupinder's bed was empty.

The Nawab and his Begum, who two and a half weeks earlier had been rich in children, now had but twenty. They were distraught. Helpless. At their wits' end. Clearly, this was a case for Rupert Beersley.



We left Calcutta in a downpour, Beersley and I, huddled in our mackintoshes like a pair of dacoits. The train was three hours late, the tea was wretched, and the steward served up an unpalatable mess of curried rice that Beersley, in a fit of pique, overturned on the floor. Out of necessity — Beersley's summons had curtailed my supper at the club — I ate my own portion and took a cup of native beer with it. "Really," Beersley said, the flanges of his extraordinary nostrils drawn up in disgust, "how can you eat that slop?"

It was a sore point between us, this question of native food, going all the way back to our first meeting at Cawnpore some twenty years back, when he was a freshly commissioned young lieutenant in the Eleventh Light Dragoons, India Corps, and I a seasoned sergeant-major. "I'll admit I've had better, old boy," I said, "but one must adapt oneself to one's circumstances."

Beersley waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal and quoted sourly from his favorite poem — indeed, the only poem from which he ever quoted, Keats's *Lamia*: "'Not three score old, yet of sciential brain/To unperplex bliss from its neighbor pain.'"

An electric-green fly had settled itself on a congealed lump of rice that lay on the table before us. I shrugged and lifted the fork to my mouth.

We arrived at the Sivani-Hoota station in the same downpour transposed a thousand miles, and were met by the Nawab's silver-plated Rolls, into the interior of which we ducked, wet as waterfowl, while the lackey stowed away our baggage. The road out to the palace was black as the caverns of hell and strewn with enough potholes to take the teeth out of

one's head. Rain crashed down on the roof as if it would cave it in, beasts roared from the wayside, and various creatures of the night slunk, crept, and darted before the headlights as if rehearsing for some weird menagerie. Nearly an hour after leaving the station, we began to discern signs of civilization along the dark roadway. First a number of thatch huts began to flash by the smeared windows, then the more substantial stone structures that indicated the approach to the palace, and finally the white marble turrets and crenellated battlements of the palace itself.

As we hurried into the entrance hall dripping like jellyfish, the Nawab, who had lost two more children in the interval between his summons and our arrival, came out to meet us, a distraught Begum at his side. Servants sprang up like mushrooms after a rain, turbaned Sikhs with appropriately somber faces, houseboys in white, ladies-in-waiting with dark staring eyes. "Mr. Beersley, I presume," the Nawab said, halting five paces from us and darting his eyes distractedly between Rupert's puggree helmet and my plaid tam-o'-shanter.

"The same," answered Beersley, bowing curtly from the waist and stepping forward to seize the Nawab's hand. "Pleased, I'm sure," he said, and then, before pausing either to introduce me or pay his respects to the Begum, he pointed to a wild-haired *sadhu* seated in the corner and praying over the yellowish flame of a dung fire. "And what precisely is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

I should say at this juncture that Beersley, though undeniably brilliant, tended also to be somewhat mercurial, and I could see that something had set him off. Perhaps it was the beastly weather or the long and poorly accommodated trip, or perhaps he was feeling the strain of overwork, called out on this case as he was so soon after the rigorous mental exercise he'd put into the baffling case of the Cornucopia Killer of Cooch Behar. Whatever it was, I saw to my embarrassment that he was in one of his dark India- and Indian-hating moods, in which he is as likely to refer to a Sikh as a "diaper-head" as he is to answer "hello" on picking up the phone receiver.

"Beg pardon?" the Nawab said, looking puzzled.

"This fellow over here in the corner, this muttering half-naked fakir — what precisely is his function?" Ignoring the shocked looks and dropped jaws of his auditors, Beersley rushed on, as if he were debating in a tavern. "What I mean to say, sir, is this: how can you expect me to take on a case of this nature when I find my very sensibilities affronted by this, this pandering to superstition and all the damnable mumbo jumbo that goes with it?"

The beards of the Sikhs bristled, their eyes flared. The Nawab, to his credit, made an effort to control himself, and with his welcoming smile reduced to a tight grim compression of the lips, he explained that the holy man in the corner was engaged in the Vedic rite of the sacred fire, energizer and destroyer, one of the three sacred elements of the Hindu trinity. Twice a day, he would also drink of the *pancha garia*, composed in equal parts of the five gifts of the sacred cow: milk, curds, ghee, urine, and dung. The Nawab had felt that the performance of these sacred rites might help cleanse and purify his house against the plague that had assailed it.

Beersley listened to all this with his lip curled in a sneer, then muttered “humbug” under his breath. The room was silent. I shuffled my feet uneasily. The Begum fastened me with the sort of look reserved for the deviates one encounters in the Bois de Boulogne, and the Nawab’s expression arranged itself in an unmistakable scowl.

“‘Do not all charms fly/At the mere touch of cold philosophy?’” Beersley said, and then turned abruptly on his heel and strode off in the direction the lackey had taken with our baggage.



In the morning, Beersley (who had refused the previous evening to attend the dinner the Nawab had arranged in his honor, complaining of fatigue and wishing only that a bit of yoghurt and a bowl of opium be sent up to his room) assembled all the principals outside the heavy mahogany door to the Nawab’s library. The eighteen remaining children were queued up to be interviewed separately; the Nawab and Begum were grilled in my presence as if they were pickpockets apprehended on the docks at Leeds; the night nurses, watchmen, chauffeurs, Sikhs, gardeners, cooks, and bottle washers were subjected to a battery of questions on subjects ranging from their sexual habits, recurring dreams, and feelings about their mothers to their recollections of Edward’s coronation and their perceptions as to the proper use of the nine iron. Finally, towards the end of the day, as the air rose from the gutters in a steaming miasma and the punkah-wallah fell asleep over his task, Miss Compton-Divot was ushered into the room.

Immediately a change came over Beersley. Where he’d been officious, domineering, as devious, threatening, and assured as one of the Czar’s secret police, he now flushed to his very ears, groped after his words, and seemed confused. I’d never seen anything like it. Beersley was known for his composure, his stoicism, his relentless pursuit of the

evidence under even the most distracting circumstances. Even during the bloody and harrowing case of the Tiger's Paw (in which Beersley ultimately deduced that the killer was dispatching his victims with the detached and taxidermically preserved paw of the rare golden tiger of Hyderabad), while the victims howled their death agony from the courtyard and whole families ran about in terror and confusion, he never flinched from his strenuous examination of the chief suspects. And now, here he was, in the presence of a comely russet-haired lass from Hertfordshire, as tongue-tied as a schoolboy.

"Miss Compton-Divot," I said, to break the awkward silence. "May I present the celebrated Mr. Rupert Beersley?"

She curtsied and smiled like a plate of buttered scones.

"And may I take this opportunity to introduce myself as well?" I continued, taking her hand. "Sergeant-Major Plantagenet Randolph, retired, at your service. Please have a seat."

I waited for Beersley to begin, but he said nothing, merely sitting there and fixing the governess with a vacuous, slack-jawed gaze. She blushed prettily and looked down to smooth her dress and arrange her petticoats. After an interval, Beersley murmured, "'And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,/Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,/And still the cup was full.'"

And that was it, he had no more to say. I prompted him, but he wouldn't be moved. Miss Compton-Divot, feeling I think the meaning of his stare, began to titter and twist the fabric of the dress in her hands. Finally, heaving an exhausted sigh and thinking ahead to dinner and the Nawab's fine Lisbon port which I'd been pleased to sample the previous evening, I showed her out of the room.

That night, little Govind, aged three and a half, disappeared without a trace.



I found Beersley in the garden the following morning, bending close over a spray of blood-red orchids. Had he found something? I hurried up to him, certain he'd uncovered the minute but crucial bit of evidence from which the entire case would unravel like a skein of yarn, as when he'd determined the identity of the guilty party in the Srinagar Strangler Case from a single strand of hair found among countless thousands of others in a barber's refuse bin. Or when an improperly cancelled stamp led him to the Benares Blackmailer. Or when half a gram's worth of flaked skin painstakingly sifted from the faded homespun loincloth of a murdered

harijan put him on the trail of the Leaping Leper of Mangalore. “Beersley,” I spurted in a barely suppressed yelp of excitement, “are you on to something, old boy?”

I was in for a shock. When he turned to me, I saw that the lucid reptilian sheen of his eyes had been replaced by a dull glaze: I might have been staring into the face of some old duffer in St. James’s Park rather than that of the most brilliant detective in all of Anglo-India. He merely lifted the corners of his mouth in a vapid smile and then turned back to the orchids, snuffing them with his great glorious nostrils like a cow up to its hocks in clover. It was the sun, I was sure of it. Or a touch of the malaria he’d picked up in Burma in ‘Ought-Two.

“Rupert!” I snapped. “Come out if it, old boy!” And then, rather roughly I must admit, I led him to a bench in the shade of a banyan tree. The sun slammed through the leaves like a mallet. From the near distance came the anguished stentorian cries of the Nawab’s prize pachyderms calling out for water. “Beersley,” I said, turning him towards me, “is it the fever? Can I get you a glass of water?”

His eyes remained fixed on a point over my left shoulder, his lips barely moved. “‘Some demon’s mistress,’” he murmured, “‘or the demon’s self.’”

“Talk sense!” I shouted, becoming ever more alarmed and annoyed. Here we’d been in Sivani-Hoota for some two days and we’d advanced not a step in solving the case, while children continued to disappear under our very noses. I was about to remonstrate further when I noticed the clay pipe protruding from his breast pocket—and then, the unmistakable odor of incinerated opium. It all became clear in that instant: he’d been up through the night, numbing his perceptions with bowl after bowl of the narcotizing drug. Something had disturbed him deeply, there was no doubt about it.

I led him straightaway to his suite of rooms in the palace’s east end and called for quinine water and hot tea. For hours, through that long, dreadful, heat-prostrated afternoon, I walked him up and down the floor, forcing the blood to wash through his veins, clear his perceptions and sharpen his wits. By teatime he was able to sit back in an easy chair, cross his legs in the characteristic brisk manner, and unburden himself. “It’s the governess,” he croaked, “that damnable little temptress, that hussy: she’s bewitched me.”

I was thunderstruck. He might as easily have confessed that he was a homosexual or the Prince of Wales in disguise. “You don’t mean to say that some, some trifling sexual dalliance is going to come between

Rupert Beersley and the pursuit of a criminal case?" My color was high. I'm sure, and my voice hot with outrage.

"No, no, no — you don't understand," he said, fixing me as of old with that keen insolent gaze. "Think back. Planty," he said, lifting the teacup to his lips. "Don't you remember the state I was in when I first came to you?"

Could I have ever forgotten? Twenty-two or -three, straight as a ramrod, thin as a whippet, the pointed nose and outsized ears accentuated by a face wasted with rigor, he'd been so silent those first months he might as well have entered the Carthusian monastery in Grenoble as the India Corps. There'd been something eating at him then, some deep canker of the soul or heart that had driven him into exile on the subcontinent he so detested. Later, much later, he'd told me. It had been a woman, daughter of a Hertford squire: on the eve of their wedding she'd thrown him over for another man. "Yes," I said, "of course I remember."

He uncoiled himself from the chair, set down the teacup, and strode to the window. Below, on the polo maidan, the Nawab and half a dozen of his retainers glided to and fro on pampered Arabians while the westering sun fell into the grip of a band of monsoon clouds. Beersley gazed out on the scene for half a moment, then turned to me with an emotion twenty years dead quivering in those magnificent nostrils. "Elspeth," he said, his voice catching. "She's her daughter."



That evening the Nawab threw a sumptuous entertainment. There was music, dancing, a display of moving lights. Turbaned Sikhs poured French wines, jugglers juggled, the Begum beamed, and platter after platter of fine toothsome morsels was set before us. I'd convinced Beersley to overcome his antipathy to native culture and accept the invitation, as a means both of drawing him out of his funk and placating the Nawab. As we were making our way into the banquet room, however, Beersley had suddenly stopped short and seized my arm. Mr. Bagwas and Mr. Patel were following close on our heels and nearly collided with us, so abruptly did we stop; Beersley waited for them to pass, then indicated a marble bench in the courtyard to our left. When we were alone he asked if I'd seen Miss Compton-Divot as we'd crossed the foyer on our way in.

"Why, yes," I said. She'd been dressed in native costume — a saffron-colored sari and hemp sandals — and had pulled the ginger hair back from her forehead in the way of the Brahmin women.

“Did you notice anything peculiar?”

“No, not a bit,” I said. “A charming girl really, nothing more.”

“Tell me,” he demanded, the old cutting edge restored to his voice, “if you didn’t see her bent over the fakir for a moment — just the hair of a moment — as we stepped through the door.”

“Well yes, yes old boy, I suppose I did. What of it?”

“Nothing, perhaps. But — ”

At that moment we were interrupted by Mr. Bagwas, who stood grinning before us. “Most reverend gentlemen,” he said, drawing back his lips in an idiotic grin that showed off the reddened stumps of teeth ravaged over the years through the filthy habit of betel nut chewing, “the Nawab awaits.”

We were ushered to the Nawab’s table and given the place of honor beside the Nawab and his Begum, several of the older children, Messieurs Bagwas and Patel, the Nawab’s two former wives, six of his current concubines, and the keeper of the sacred monkeys. Miss Compton-Divot, I quickly ascertained, was not present. I thought it odd, but soon forgot all about her, as we applauded the jugglers, acrobats, musicians, temple dancers, and trained bears until the night began to grow old. It was at this point that the Nawab rose heavily to his feet, waved his hands for silence, and haw-hawed a bit before making a brief speech. “Even in the darkest hour shines a light,” he said, the customary fat pout of his lips giving way to a wistful grin. “What I mean to say, damn it, is that the Begum here is pregnant, gravid, heavy with child, that even when we find ourselves swallowed up in grief over our lost lambs we discover that here is a bun in the oven after all.”

Beersley gave a snort of withering contempt and was about, I’m sure, to expatiate on the fatuity of the native mind and its lack of proportion and balance — not to mention rigor, discipline, and concentration — when the whole party was thrown into an uproar by a sudden ululating shriek emanating from the direction of the nursery. My companion was up like a hound and out the door before anyone else in the room could so much as set down a water glass. Though I tend to stoutness myself and am rather shorter of breath than I was in my military days, I was nevertheless the fourth or fifth man out the doorway, down the corridor, across the courtyard, and up the jade steps to the children’s quarters.

When I got there, heaving for breath and with the sweat standing out on my forehead, I found Beersley kneeling over the prostrate form of one of the watchmen, from between whose scapulae protruded the hilt of a cheap ten-penny nail file. The children had retreated screaming to the far

end of the dormitory where they clutched one another's nightgowns in terror. "Poison," Beersley said with a profound disgust at the crudity of the killer's method as he slipped the nail file from its fatal groove. A single sniff of its bloody sharpened point bore him out. He carefully wrapped the thing in his handkerchief, stowed it away in his breast pocket, and then leapt to his feet. "The children!" he cried. "Quickly now, line them up and count them!"

The Nawab stood bewildered in the doorway, the Begum went pale and fell to her knees while her retainers wrung their hands in distress and the children shuffled about confusedly, their faces tear-stained, their nightgowns a collision of sad airy clouds. And then all at once Miss Compton-Divot appeared, striding the length of the room to gather up two of her smaller wards in her lovely arms. "One," she began, "two, three, four" It wasn't until several hours later that we understood what had happened. The murder in the dormitory had been a ruse. A diversion. Vallabhbhai Shiva, aged sixteen, a plump oleaginous boy who'd sat directly across from Beersley and me during the entertainment, was nowhere to be found.



"A concentrate of the venom of the banded krait," Beersley said, holding a test tube up to the light. It was early, not yet nine a.m., and the room reeked of opium fumes. "Nasty stuff, Planty — works on the central nervous system. I calculate there was enough of it smeared on the nether end of that nail file to dispatch half the unwashables in Delhi and give the Nawab's prize pachyderms the runs for a week."

I fell into an armchair draped with one of my companion's Oriental dressing gowns. "Monstrous," was all I could say.

Beersley's eyes were lidded with the weight of the opium. His speech was slow and yet even that powerful soporific couldn't suppress the excitement in his voice. "Don't you see, old boy — she's solved the case for us."

"Who?"

"The Lamia. It's a little lesson in appearance and reality. Serpent's venom indeed, the little vixen." And then he was quoting: "'She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,/Vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue' Don't you see?"

"No, Beersley," I said, rising to my feet rather angrily and crossing the room to where the clay pipe lay on the dressing table, "no, I'm afraid I don't."

“It’s the motive that puzzles me,” he said, musing over the vial in his hand as I snatched the clay pipe from the table and stoutly snapped it in two. He barely noticed. All at once he was holding the nail file up before my face, cradling it carefully in its linen nest. “Do you have any idea where this was manufactured, old boy?”

I’d been about to turn on him and tell him he was off his head, about to curse his narcotizing, his non sequiturs, and the incessant bloody poetry quoting that had me at my wits’ end, but he caught me up short. “What?”

“The nail file, old fellow.”

“Well, er, no. I hadn’t really thought much about it.”

He closed his eyes a moment, exposing the peculiar deep violet coloration of his eyelids. “Badham and Son, Manufacturers,” he said in a colorless monotone, as if he were reading an advertisement, “Implements for Manicure and Pedicure, Number 17, Parsonage Lane” — and here he paused to flash open his eyes so that I felt them seize me like a pair of pincers — “Hertford.”

Again I was thunderstruck. “But you don’t mean to say that, that you suspect — ?”

My conjecture was cut short by a sudden but deferential rap at the door. “Entrez,” Beersley called, the sneer he cultivated for conducting interrogations or dealing with natives and underlings scalloping his upper lip. The door swung to and a pair of shrunken little houseboys bowed into the room with our breakfast. Beersley, characteristically indifferent to the native distaste for preparing or consuming meat, had ordered kidneys, rashers, eggs, and toast with a pot of tea, jam, and catsup. He moved forward to the table, allowed himself to be seated, and then called rather sharply to the retreating form of the first servant. “You there,” he said, pushing his plate away. The servant wheeled round as if he’d been shot, exchanged a stricken look with his compatriot stationed behind the table, and bowed low. “I want the Nawab’s food taster up here tout de suite — within the minute. Understand?”

“What is it, Beersley?” I said, inspecting the plate. “Looks all right to me.” But he would say nothing until the food taster arrived.

From beyond the windows came the fiendish caterwauling and great terrible belly roars of the Nawab’s caged tigers as they impatiently awaited their breakfast. I stared down at the bloodied nail file a moment and then at the glistening china plate with its bulbous kidneys, lean red rashers, and golden eggs. When I looked up, the food taster was standing in the doorway. He was a young man, worn about the eyes and thin as a

beggar from the pressures and uncertainties of his job. He bowed his way nervously into the room and said in a tremulous voice, "You called for me, sahib?"

Beersley merely indicated the plate. "A bit of this kidney here," he said.

The man edged forward, clumsily hacked off a portion of the suspect kidney, and closing his eyes, popped it into his mouth, chewed perfunctorily, and swallowed. As his Adam's apple bobbed on the recoil, he opened his eyes and smiled like a man who's passed a harrowing ordeal. But then, alarmingly, the corners of his mouth began to droop and his limbs to tremble. Within ten seconds he was clutching his stomach, and within the minute he was stretched out prone on the floor, dead as a pharaoh.



Things had taken a nasty turn. That evening, as Beersley interrogated the kitchen staff with a ferocity and doggedness unusual even for him, I found myself sniffing suspiciously at my bottle of porter, and though my stomach protested vigorously, I refused even to glance at the platter of *jalebis* the Nawab's personal chef had set before me. Beersley was livid. He raged, threatened, cajoled. The two houseboys who had brought the fatal kidney were so shaken that they confessed to all manner of peccancies, including the furtive eating of meat on the part of the one, and an addiction to micturating in the Nawab's soup on the part of the other — and yet clearly they were innocent of any complicity in the matter of the kidney. It was nearly midnight when Beersley dismissed the last of the kitchen servants — the third chutney spicer's assistant — and turned to me with a face drawn with fatigue. "Planty," he said, "I shall have your kidnapper for you by tea tomorrow."

He was at it all night. I woke twice — at half past three and close on to six — and saw the light burning in his window across the courtyard. He was indefatigable when he was on the scent, and as I plumped the pillows and drifted off, I knew he would prove true to his word. Unfortunately, in the interval, the Nawab lost two more children.



The whole house was in a state of agitation the following afternoon when Beersley summoned the Nawab and his Begum, Messrs. Patel and Bagwas, Hugh Tureen, Miss Compton-Divot, and several other members of the household staff to "an enlightenment session" in the Nawab's

library. Miss Compton-Divot, wearing a conventional English gown with bustle, sash, and uplifted bosom, stepped shyly into the room, like a fawn emerging from the bracken to cross the public highway. This was the first glimpse Beersley had allowed himself of her since the night of the entertainment and its chilling aftermath, and I saw him turn sharply away as she entered. Hugh Tureen, the game hunter, strode confidently across the room while Mr. Patel and Mr. Bagwas huddled together in a corner over delicate little demitasses of tea and chatted village gossip. In contrast, the Nawab seemed upset, angry even. He marched into the room, a little brown butterball of a man followed at a distance by his wife, and confronted Beersley before the latter could utter a word. “I am at the end of my stamina and patience,” he sputtered. “It’s been nearly a week since you’ve arrived and the criminals are still at it. Last night it was the twins, Indira and er” — here he conferred in a brief whisper with his wife — “Indira and Sushila. Who will it be tonight?”

Outside, the monsoon recommenced with a sudden crashing fall of rain that smeared the windows and darkened the room till it could have been dusk. I listened to it hiss in the gutters like a thousand coiled snakes.

Beersley gazed down on the Nawab with a look of such contempt I almost feared he would kick him aside as one might kick an importunate cur out of the roadway, but instead he merely folded his arms and said, “I can assure you, sir, that the kidnapper is in this very room and shall be brought to justice before the hour is out.”

The ladies gasped, the gentlemen exclaimed. “What?” “Who?” “He can’t be serious?” I found myself swelling with pride. Though the case was as foggy to me as it had been on the night of our arrival, I knew that Beersley, in his brilliant and inimitable way, had solved it. When the hubbub had died down, Beersley requested that the Nawab take a seat so that he might begin. I leaned back comfortably in my armchair and awaited the denouement.

“First,” Beersley said, clasping his hands behind his back and rocking to and fro on the balls of his feet, “the facts of the case. To begin with, we have a remote, half-beggared duchy under the hand of a despotic prince known for his self-indulgence and the opulence of his court — ”

At once the Nawab leapt angrily to his feet. “I beg your pardon, sir, but I find this most offensive. If you cannot conduct your investigation in a civil and properly respectful manner, I shall have to ask you to, to — ”

“Please, please, please,” Beersley was saying as he motioned the Nawab back into his seat, “be patient and you’ll soon see the method in all this. Now, as I was saying: we have a little out-of-the-way state

despoiled by generations of self-serving rulers, rulers whose very existence is sufficient to provoke widespread animosity if not enmity among the populace. Next we have the mysterious and unaccountable disappearance of the current Nawab's heirs and heiresses — that is, Gopal, Abha, Shanker, Santha, Bhupinder, Bimal and Manu, Govind, Vallabhbhai Shiva, and now Indira and Sushila — beginning on a moonless night two weeks ago to this day, the initial discovery of such disappearance made by the children's governess, one Miss Elspeth Compton-Divot."

At the mention of the children, the Begum, who was seated to my left, began to whimper softly. Miss Compton-Divot boldly held Beersley's gaze as he named her, the two entrepreneurs — Bagwas and Patel — leaned forward attentively, and Hugh Tureen yawned mightily. As for myself, I began to feel rather sleepy. The room was terrifically hot despite the rain, and the glutinous breeze that wafted up from the punkah bathed me in sweat.

"Thus far," Beersley continued, "we have a kidnapper whose motives remained obscure — but then the kidnapper turned murderer, and as he felt me close on his trail he attempted murder once again. And let me remind you of the method employed in both cases — a foul and feminine method, I might add — that is, the use of poison. I have here," he said, producing the nail file, "the weapon used to kill the servant set to watch over the Nawab's flock. It is made of steel and was manufactured in England — in Hertford, to be precise." At this point, Beersley turned to the governess and addressed her directly. "Is it not true, Miss Compton-Divot, that you were born and raised in Hertfordshire and that but six months ago you arrived in India seeking employment?"

The governess's face lost its color in that instant. "Yes," she stammered, "it is true, but —"

"And," Beersley continued, approaching to within a foot of her chair and holding the nail file out before him as if it were a hot poker, "do you deny that this is your file, brought with you from England for some malignant purpose?"

"I don't!" she shouted in obvious agitation. "Or rather I do. I mean, yes, it is my nail file, but I lost it — or, or someone stole it — some weeks ago. Certainly you don't think that I —?"

"That you are the murderer, Miss Compton-Divot?"

Her face was parchment, her pretty neck and bosom as white as if they'd never seen the light of day.

"No, my dear, not the murderer," Beersley said, straightening him-

self and pacing back across the room like a great stalking cat, “but are murderer and kidnapper one and the same? But hold on a minute, let us consider the lines of the greatest poet of them all, one who knew as I do how artifice and deceit seethe through the apparent world and how tough-minded and true one must be to unconfound the illusion from the reality. ‘There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:/We know her woof,’” he intoned, and I began to realize that something had gone wrong, that his voice had begun to drag and his lids to droop. He fumbled over the next line or two, then paused to collect himself and cast his unsteady gaze out over the room. “‘Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,/Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,/Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine — ’”

Here I cut him off. “Beersley,” I demanded, “get on with it, old boy.” It was the opium. I could see it now. Yes, he’d been up all night with the case and with his pellucid mind, but with his opium bowl too.

He staggered back at the sound of my voice and shook his head as if to clear it, and then, whirling round, he pointed a terrible riveting finger at the game hunter and shrieked: “Here, here is your murderer!”

Tureen, a big florid fellow in puttees and boots, sprang from his chair in a rage. “What? You dare to accuse me, you, you preposterous little worm?” He would have fallen on Beersley and, I believe, torn him apart had not the Nawab’s Sikhs interceded.

“Yes, Hugh Tureen,” Beersley shouted, a barely suppressed rage shaking his voice in emotional storm, “you who’ve so long fouled yourself with the blood of beasts, you killed for the love of her, for the love of this, this” — and here the word literally burst from his lips like the great Lord’s malediction on Lucifer — “Lamia!”

A cry went round the room. “Oh yes, and she — black heart, foul seductress — led you into her web just as she led you,” he shouted, whirling on the Nawab, “Yadavindra Singh. Yes, meeting with you secretly in foul unlawful embrace, professing her love while working in complicity with this man,” indicating Bagwas, “and your damned ragged fakir, to undermine your corrupt dynasty, to deprive you of your heirs, poison your wife in her sleep, and succeed to the throne as the fourth Begum of Sivani-Hoota!”

Everyone in the room was on his feet. There were twenty disputations, rain crashed at the windows, Tureen raged in the arms of the Sikhs, and the Nawab looked as if he were in the throes of an apoplectic fit. Over it all came the voice of Beersley, gone shrill now with excitement. “Whore!” he screamed, descending on the governess. “Conspiring with

Bagwas, tempting him with your putrid charms and the lucre the Nawab gave out in exchange for your favors . . . yes, drugging the children and night nurses with your quote hot chocolate!" Beersley swung around again, this time to face the Begum, who looked as confused as if she'd awakened to find herself amid the Esquimaux in Alaska. "And you, dear sinned-against lady: your little ones are dead, smothered by Bagwas and his accomplice Patel, sealed in rubber at the plant and shipped in bulk to Calcutta. Look for them there so that at least they might have a decent burial."

I was at Beersley's side now, trying to fend off the furious rushes of his auditors, but he seemed to have lost control. "Tureen!" he shrieked, "you fool, you jackanapes! You believed in this harlot, this Compton-Divot, this feminine serpent! Believed her when she lay in your disgusting arms and promised you riches when she found her way to the top! Good God!" he cried, breaking past me and rushing again at the governess who stood shrinking in the corner, "'Lamia! Begone foul dream!'"

It was then that the Nawab's Sikhs turned on my unfortunate companion and pinioned his arms. The Nawab, rage trembling through his corpulent body, struck Beersley across the mouth three times in quick succession, and as I threw myself forward to protect him, a pair of six-foot Sikhs drew their daggers to warn me off. The rest happened so quickly I can barely reconstruct it. There was the Nawab, foaming with anger, his speech about decency, citizens of the crown and rural justice, the mention of tar and feathers, the hasty packing of our bags, the unceremonious bum's rush out the front gate, and then the long wearying trek in the merciless rain to the Sivani-Hoota station.



Some weeks later an envelope with the monogram EC-D arrived in the evening mail at my bungalow in Calcutta. Inside I found a rather wounding and triumphant letter from Miss Compton-Divot. Beersley, it seemed, had been wrong on all counts. Even in identifying her with the woman he had once loved, which I believe now lay at the root of his problem in this difficult case. She was in fact the daughter of a governess herself, and had had no connection whatever with Squire Trelawney — whom she knew by reputation in Hertfordshire — or his daughter. As for the case of the missing children, she had been able, with the aid of Mr. Bagwas, to solve it herself. It seemed that practically the only suspicion in which Beersley was confirmed was his mistrust of the *sadhu*. Miss Compton-Divot had noticed the fellow prowling about the upper rooms

in the vicinity of the children's quarters one night, and had determined to keep a close watch on him. Along with Bagwas, she was able to tail the specious holy man to his quarters in the meanest street of Sivani-Hoota's slums. There they hid themselves and watched as he transformed himself into a ragged beggar with a crabbed walk who hobbled through the dark streets to his station, among a hundred other beggars, outside the colonnades of the Colonial Office. To their astonishment, they saw that the beggars huddled round him — all of whom had been deprived of the power of speech owing to an operation too gruesome to report here — were in fact the children of the Nawab. The beggar master was promptly arrested and the children returned to their parents.

But that wasn't all: there remained the motive. When dragged before the Nawab in chains and condemned to death by *peine forte et dure*, the beggar master spat forth his venom. "Don't you recognize me?" he taunted the Nawab. "Look closer." Understanding animated the Nawab's features and a low exclamation escaped his lips: "Rajendra!" he gasped. "Yes," sneered the beggar master, "the same. The man you wronged thirty-five years ago when you set your filthy minions on me, burned my house and barn to the ground, and took my wife for your own first Begum. She turned her back on me for your promises and you turned me out of the state to wander begging the rest of my life. I have had my revenge." The Nawab had broken down in tears, the beggar master was hauled off to be tortured to death, and the nine tongueless children were brought home to be instructed in sign language by Miss Compton-Divot, who became engaged to marry Mr. Bagwas the following week.

And so ends the baffling and ever-surprising case of the Beggar Master of Sivani-Hoota. I did not show the governess's letter to Beersley, incidentally. I felt that he'd been under an unnatural strain over the course of the past several months, and determined instead to take him for a rest cure to a little hotel in the grassy hills of the Punjab, a place that, so they say, bears a striking resemblance to Hertfordshire.

Ancient Airs, Voices

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

Volume 44, Number 1 Winter 1986

Joyce Carol Oates received the 1987 O. Henry Award for this story. Other pieces of hers have appeared in these pages from time to time since summer 1966. She teaches at Princeton.

Timespeededup: November 22, 1983

Eighteen years & five months will be a matter of (as the coroner afterward estimates) forty minutes' erasure. There is a beauty in such economy. There is nobility of a sort. There is also, as Mikey had not dared to anticipate, a leisurely pace to the procedure because the heart's frightened pumping grows progressively weaker (and less frightened) as the pressure of the blood decreases.

A mathematical equation, an inverse ratio of some sort? — Mikey settles himself into the tepid bathwater, eyes closed, to think about it.

Superstition

When Mikey's mother Helen was much younger than he is at the time of his death, when she was in fact a slightly precocious eleven or twelve, she played at scaring herself and her girl friends with: *What is the worst thing that can happen?*

Whatever they said, whatever horror (usually personal and domestic) they came up with, Helen would say: But isn't there something worse?

Yes, okay, but isn't there something worse?

Yes, but —

But —

She saw that it was more powerful to be in control of questions, not answers. *What is the worst thing that can happen?*

When she was twenty-four years old and pregnant with her unknown yet-to-be-named baby, when her sharp angles and jumpy nerves were plumped out in a ripe rosy bloodwarm well-being that couldn't be hers yet *was* — when she thought secretly of herself as swollen with love (love *for*, love *of*, both her husband and the yet-to-be-named baby) — it occurred to her one day, crossing Harvard Square at an imprudent angle and at an ill-calculated moment (cautionary yellow about to change to red), precisely what the worst thing would be.

She told Neil about it that night in bed, whispering. She expected him to comfort her though it was late, past midnight, and he had a moot court session the next morning at eight. (He so often comforted her these days. These weeks. He was, as both his parents commented, not quite approvingly, “growing up fast.”) But he responded impatiently, rubbing his forearm against his face, snorting with exasperation, as if Helen brought up such morbid things all the time now, and he'd had enough. That's superstition, he said angrily. You don't know it but that's superstition: trying to define the very worst so that it can't happen because if you define it, it *can't* happen as you have defined it.

That isn't true, Helen said, drawing away from him.

What isn't true? — that it's superstition, or that, if you define something to yourself, it can't happen? Neil asked.

She fashioned a little cocoon for herself of the bedclothes, at the very edge of the bed. She doubled the pillow up uncomfortably beneath her head. She was waiting to cry — tears had their own authority now — but nothing happened. When she and Neil quarreled a curious sort of flame-like rage shot up between them, instantaneous and heart-stopping in its virulence. Yet it meant nothing, they loved each other, they were in fact — were to be for five, six more years — crazy in love with each other.

Desire

These are the classic years of romance, of adulterous romance, when to think of desire is immediately to experience desire; and to think of (nobly, contemptuously) resisting desire is immediately to experience desire. Though Neil and his friend Garrett's wife are not conscious, at the time, of their good fortune.

These are the years of romance, bittersweet in memory; and of desire so potent it plucks at the roots of one's being. But these are not, in retrospect, years of love. (Neil is waiting, he tells himself, for desire to shade into love. Desire *must* shade into love. But he waits impatiently, resentfully. At times he fantasizes dying with Yvette — by accident — only by accident — driving on the turnpike, for instance, crashing into a retaining wall.)

Neil is thirty-seven when the affair begins, Yvette is thirty-one, Neil's son Mikey is ten years old, Yvette's daughter Sonya is seven. Guilty, flushed with pride, the lovers talk about their children often: each pretends a genuine interest in the other's child. Mikey is the brightest boy in his fifth-grade class, Sonya is a sweetheart, so pretty. Mikey doesn't seem to make friends easily; Sonya is so *spoiled*. Does Mikey sense that something is . . . strained between his parents? Sonya, fortunately, cheerful, chattering Sonya, notices nothing.



They agree that they love their children, they love their children more than, well, their own lives. Neil grows vehement on the subject, Yvette frequently cries. Sweet, bittersweet, agitated, *poignant* . . .

The Unforgivable

You aren't thinking, God damn you, Neil whispers, so that Helen, who is sobbing, cannot quite hear. It is one of their "minor" quarrels, no one will be slapped, pummeled, thrown shrieking across a bed, banged against a closet door — no one will pull books or records off a shelf, or smash china in the kitchen, in a trance of hysteria. Indeed, the quarrel is so minor, it will soon be forgotten; except, perhaps, by the Schuelers' son.

Again, whispering, panting, Neil says: *You're thinking with your — womb.*



These are the frantic, jumbled months of 1975, the era of unforgivable insults that are not quite said out loud; and not quite heard.

(Except, perhaps, little Michael hears. Dark-eyed spiky-haired little Michael, Mikey as his grandmother calls him, who soon becomes an expert in things said and not said, heard and not heard. Michael who gets uniformly high grades in school — *very* high grades in arithmetic, then

math—with an aristocratic sort of contempt for the mere act of performing, competing, *earning*. Mikey of whom both his parents appear to be nervously proud; of course they *are* proud, excitedly informed by one of the boy's teachers that his I.Q. has been measured at 183; and his “creative potential” is in the very highest percentile.)



Of course the guilty lovers insult each other as well, say unforgivable things calculated to do great injury—to lacerate, pierce, demolish. Simply by accusing Neil of not loving her, Yvette has the power of rendering him frantic; simply by walking out, slamming a door (not by design, that's the frightening thing, but furiously, helplessly), Neil (Neil Schueler the congenial, the entirely *reliable* husbandfatheronbrothercolleague-citizen) has the power to reduce Yvette Held to an anguish so physical that she imagines her bodily gravity has increased tenfold. (What to do on such days but crawl into bed, hide away her misery, allow Garrett to console her without knowing why he is consoling her... without knowing whom, precisely, he consoles. What's wrong Yvette, what's wrong please tell me are you sick Yvette should I call a doctor Yvette please tell me what's *wrong*—the lament of many a kindly husband, in the year of romance 1975. While across town at the Schuelers' Helen discerns but cannot bring herself to name the love-abscess working in her husband's gut; and one evening it is Mikey, cautious little Mikey, who plays suddenly at being a much younger child and huddles in his pajamas in his Daddy's lap, burrowing into Daddy's chest, begging, giggling, You aren't going to go away are you Daddy...? You *aren't* going to go away *are* you Daddy...?)



Guilt, improvisation, despairing delight, oh delightful bowel-wrenching despair. The usual. Yet it's the first time, such fancies: telephone calls hot and breathless as bouts of love made from, for instance, a forgotten hotel in a forgotten midwestern city, when Neil, sick with love, anxious to “finally get things straight,” excuses himself in the awkward midst of a luncheon meeting, an important luncheon meeting, to rush away to his room on the forty-ninth floor and dial the Held residence back home—to speak with Yvette, with whom he'd spoken (and quarreled) that very morning. Yet another instance: Yvette, feverish, sleepless, slips away from her sleeping husband, walks barefoot past the door (always slightly ajar, to accommodate her nighttime fears) of her sleeping daughter,

descends into the darkened kitchen to dial the number, *that* number, of her presumably sleeping lover some three or four miles away . . . and the phone is answered on the first ring . . . by Neil? or by Helen? or little Mikey?

November 1973

In Cunningham's *Drugs* beneath the too-bright fluorescent lighting she stands tall and splendid in a camel's-hair coat, her blonde hair glittering as if with chips of mica, lightly scolding her pouting little girl (such a beautiful child! — Neil feels an actual pang of loss, why hadn't he and Helen had another child, a girl, to balance Mikey), unaware of Neil Schueler a few yards away. Yes, she's the one, that woman, *her*, though he knows himself invisible and harmless, her husband's friend Neil, married to pretty dark Helen whom he loves and whom he would no more think of betraying than . . . than he would betray the confidence of the prestigious law firm for which he works.

Parties, dinners, accidental meetings in other people's homes, occasional (increasingly frequent) sightings in town, the public library, the dry cleaners, the Village Market, and always he's invisible, supremely innocent; he isn't spying on Yvette Held (*he* isn't that sort of man, happily married, thoroughly content with his life) . . . and she isn't aware of him. Except, perhaps, obliquely.

A wintry November afternoon, pitch dark at five-thirty, and again Neil happens to see her by accident, at the Texaco station, again in the camel's-hair coat, a sporty striped scarf wound around her throat. She's upset, she's arguing with one of the mechanics; he had promised her car for five o'clock but now he tells her it won't be ready for another hour, maybe an hour and a half, and she doesn't know what to do, it's so trivial and demeaning a thing, but what should she *do*: sit in the freezing waiting room and wait for her car, or call Garrett, have him pick her up, get the car in the morning . . .

Neil offers to drive her home. Of course.

It's so trivial and demeaning, says Yvette, wiping angrily at her nose, and Neil says gravely, happily: I don't think it is.

The Wives

. . . are not friends though they might be said to have been, at one time, "friendly acquaintances."

Helen is nearly forty-four when the master of Mikey's residential college at Yale telephones with the news (two days before Thanksgiving of 1983); Yvette is thirty-nine. Both women are invariably "young for their age"; the remark (generally made by a man) is of course meant to be flattering.

Helen, who thinks of herself as numb, hollow, emptied out, as if (for instance) she'd had a massive gynecological operation, is a very attractive woman: small-boned, olive-skinned, with damp dark eyes and a delicate high-bridged nose, a small mouth. She becomes starkly visible to her husband only when something in the household goes wrong *and someone is to blame*. Otherwise, she is invisible to him and he loves her. He loves her well enough. No — he doesn't love her at all (why lie about it?) but he is responsible for her, a little frightened of her (her drinking, her spasms of cruel silent laughter, her *eyes*), worried about her effect (her "neurotic" behavior) upon their son.

Yvette, the beloved, the Object of Desire, is tall, rangy, blonde, with a wide oval face and strong cheekbones, gray-green eyes, a fleshy mouth. She mugs, she jokes, she makes faces, her gestures are loose and casual, her confidence in herself (her beauty, her power) is absolute: is it possible she has never grown up? She dresses with a stylish silly chic, Chinese woollen jackets, suede trousers and vests, high-heeled boots, fur-lined capes, white silk dresses, pale hair in tiny braids coiled prettily about her head. Her secret is a terrifying craving for forbidden foods (Planters peanuts devoured in fistfuls, M&Ms by the bag, French fries lurid with salty grease) which she combats by going on impromptu fasts, once or twice a month, losing so much weight (what exhilaration, to starve herself! — it's better than sex) her pelvis bones begin to show through her tightest pair of jeans and her cagey eyes are all shadow. At such times she exults in feeling light-headed, transparent, angelic. She exults in the fact that two highly attractive men — her husband and her lover — watch anxiously over her.

Even before Helen learned specifically of the affair, she bravely asked Neil whether he wanted a divorce; whether he wanted a trial separation; whether he might be "happier" without her. (Don't be ridiculous, Neil said at once, frightened, excited — you don't know what you're talking about.) Helen has a master's degree in biology, Helen plans to return to graduate school soon; she is fully capable (as she says, often) of living her own independent life.

As for Yvette: she intimidates Garrett simply by *hinting* . . . if he isn't entirely happy (with her moods, her treatment of Sonya, her circle of

youngish friends)... he has the "option" of moving out.

Yvette is *loved*, Helen is *not-loved*, and is there any logical reason? There is not. There is not. As Neil would be the first to admit.

(Indeed, he sometimes imagines closing his fingers, hard, around Yvette's throat. The squirming eel-like body, the magnificent muscled legs, all the *blondenness* ... erased forever. This is the woman who deserves humiliation, rejection, pain, and not poor Helen who is so ... undeserving.)

The wives, the wives. Yet they are not interchangeable parts, that's the problem. As Neil would be the first to admit.

The Seven Bridges of Königsberg

She is awake, walking about the house in the dark. Mikey knows she is touching things, groping, trying to keep her balance; he feels the tension, tightening, in her head. She has become a blind woman, prowling downstairs in the dark, sometimes her eyes *are* shut tight; does he dare to approach her? — touch her? — take her cold limp hand in his?

Mother I hate you. Mother please die.

But no: Mother I love you, *Mother please don't die*.

Michael Schueler's father is away: a conference in Brussels, a meeting in Frankfurt, confidential business in Tokyo. He telephones home dutifully, talking five minutes to Helen, five minutes to Mikey. He's a good father, he calls home. (It's true that he "moved out" for a while — a few weeks when Mikey was fourteen — but that's ancient history now, that's long forgotten.) There are Occasions: Thanksgiving, Christmas, the usual birthdays, Easter Sunday, Grandma's funeral, Mikey's First Prize at the State Science Fair. There are comradely fatherson Saturday mornings in the car, doing errands, taking Mikey to the dentist, stopping by the public library, that sort of thing, afterward raking leaves (in season), shoveling snow (in season), digging up the flowerbeds (in season) for Mother to plant her wax begonias and impatiens. Mikey calmly notes the *routine*, the *logic*, the *normality*. The Schuelers are (are *almost*) a television family, they strike the observing eye as so routine and so normal, and clearly they're an attractive threesome: mother and son dark and ferret-faced, father tall sandy-haired embarrassed scowling smiling, the skin crinkling heartily about his eyes. Hey Dad!

Mikey listens hard, but no longer hears the quarrels.

Were they a fiction of his boyhood? — his childhood?

Had he imagined everything?



Little Michael Schueler who isn't precisely popular at school — so taciturn, so solemn, yet with that sarcastic look, as if he knows the answer to the question (he knows the answers to *all* the questions) but won't condescend to raise his hand. His teachers pretend to be fond of him, his classmates make no pretense. (A shy kid. Scared. Weird. Has a temper. A nice enough kid but, well, maybe a little ... unbalanced? One day another boy flicked water into Mikey's face at the drinking fountain and Mikey went crazy — hitting, kicking, screaming, *swearing* — every sort of foul word you can imagine. He bloodied the other boy's nose, had to be half-carried to the principal's office, sobbing, hysterical, *I'll kill anyone who touches me, I'll kill anyone who touches me*. A small kid but, God, really strong.)

But he doesn't know all the answers, he doesn't even know all the questions. He's frightened of what he doesn't know. *And there is so much*. At the age of twelve he investigates analytical geometry and calculus, at the age of thirteen he invents (not very successfully) his own geometry, at the age of fourteen he broods over the Möbius strip with its *single edge* and *single side*, a logical impossibility. (Or, as he tells his mother, an illogical possibility.) At the age of fifteen he amuses himself by making a model of the famous Seven Bridges of Königsberg to tape on his bedroom wall, with the intention (he's joking of course) of solving the problem within a year.

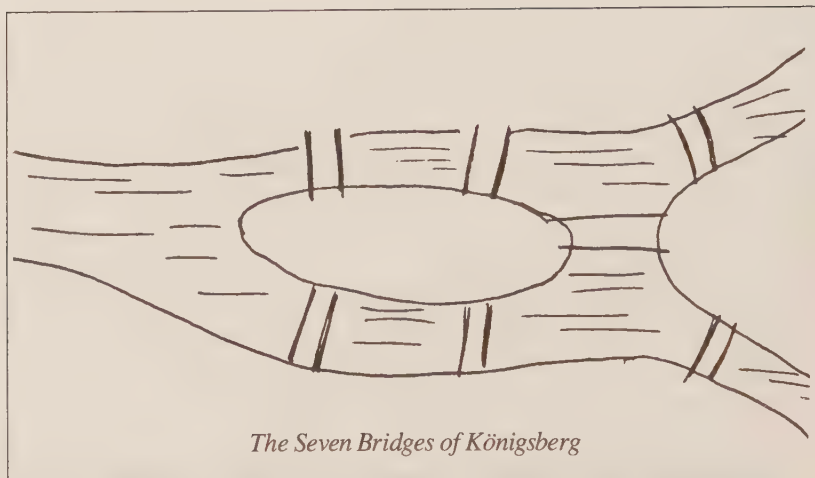
He won't solve it because, as the Swiss mathematician Euler demonstrated centuries ago, *it is insoluble*, yet, still, he's having fun, he likes to lie propped up on his elbows on the bed, staring, blinking, thinking hard, thinking very very hard, until his forehead is covered with an itchy film of perspiration and his eyes burn. Don't make yourself ill, Mother cautions, brushing his damp hair out of his face — don't make me worry about you, all right?

It's a hoary old puzzle, an ancient conundrum, a bit of Infinity to tape to the wall, and simple enough: Can you cross each bridge in turn *in one unbroken path* without crossing any of the bridges twice?

Yes. Sure. *He* (secretly) thinks so. Just give him time.

(A front-page story in the *New York Times*, which Daddy and all of Daddy's friends read: Fifteen-Year-Old Mathematical Genius Solves Classic Problem.)

So Mikey dreams of the Seven Bridges of Königsberg, he squints, shuts his eyes hard, opens them again, stares at the sheet of construction paper on the wall, feels his heartbeat accelerate with the ... certainty ...



that he is going to succeed where hundreds, thousands, of mathematicians failed. Oh yes he's going to solve it! Maybe by accident, intuition, the way he beats his father at chess if he can get his father to play (Mikey beats him nine games out of ten though he hasn't any chess strategy per se); the way he guesses what his mother is thinking though she stands with her back to him, calm and rigid, unaware of his presence. Oh yes he's going to solve it, just give him time.

One bridge and then another and then another. A clockwise then a counterclockwise motion. And now he doubles back shrewdly on himself to travel on land. And now he twists about, in a surprising maneuver. And now No, he's been on this bridge already . . . or has he? . . .

The Lovers, Past & Present

The baby was born, there were no complications or ugly surprises, they named him Michael after Neil's father's father; they saw that he was a beautiful baby, a perfect baby, mother's and father's flesh mysteriously conjoined. A gasping fish's mouth, tiny fingers that clutch, eyes clear with hunger, then cloudy with the need to sleep: so sweet, so funny, hot with life: theirs. One of the stories Neil told for years was that he'd been communicating with his boy before the birth, oh as many as eight weeks before the actual birth, one of the stories Helen told, which she will begin to tell again after Mikey's suicide, was that she couldn't . . . quite . . . bring together the fact of being pregnant with the fact of having, being in the possession of, being responsible for, this particular baby. Not that she

didn't, doesn't, love him; not at all. She loves him, or loved him, the way you love . . . your own flesh? . . . no, your own self. No. It is, yet it isn't, *you*: actually you love it better than you love yourself. Especially, says Helen with her breathless near-inaudible laugh — if you don't love yourself.



One of the stories Neil tells Yvette is that he and Helen “had very little to say to each other,” that they were each lonely, a little angry, baffled; she spent a good deal of time by herself, by herself or with Mikey, sometimes she'd take a nap when he took his, Neil would find the two of them together, upstairs, lying beneath an afghan, sleeping or not quite sleeping, drowsing, dreamy-peaceful, the boy sucking a corner of the afghan in his sleep, Helen's eyes snapping open as Neil — the husband after all, *the man* — entered the room in the twilight, wondering, well, how long Helen had *been* there, comatose with a year-old child.



Helen dislikes lovemaking, Helen has become obsessed with lovemaking, Helen lies tight and clenched and inaccessible, Helen clutches at her alarmed husband with a need so ravenous, so enormous, no one (so he tells himself angrily) could satisfy it. But he complains to Yvette of his wife's . . . indifference; the cold sluggish feel of her flesh; the fact that, for more than a year after Mikey's birth, she refused to make love with him and stiffened in response even to his wayward casual affectionate questioning harmless touch. It was all Baby, Neil says, his voice lightly mocking, puzzled — it was Baby this, Baby that, all *Baby*.

(He does not tell Yvette — of course he does not tell Yvette, or anyone — that the new violence of his wife's passion, the rawness of her sexual need, has become disgusting to him. These past few years. These past months especially. It is repulsive, sickening, that concentrated self-absorbed thrusting . . . insisting . . . demanding . . . the smell, the sweat, the anguish . . . the willfulness of flesh. Why should I service *you*, Neil thinks, mean and gloating and frightened, why should I perform this task with *you*, I don't even know who *you* are.)

Whereas Yvette: the rather wild rather flamboyant rather outsized passion she displays (or in fact actually feels) excites him enormously. Enormously. At any time, at any hour, in her presence or apart. Oh enormously. *Isn't this what life is all about?*



The baby *was* born, the young father *did* communicate with it (in a poetical manner of speaking) before the birth, yes it was all a miracle, it is miraculous still, but Neil feels a natural masculine resentment at being expected to contemplate a miracle for the rest of his life.



Neil Schueler, in love, is angry much of the time though he would call it happy. In Yvette Held's presence he is a *lover*, elsewhere he is, it might be said — though who but Neil could say it? — a *hater*.

His breath comes short and quick, he walks heavily, aggressively, bangs into chairs, the corners of tables, an ugly bruise on his left knee, shaving cuts on his chin, head slightly lowered, eyes narrowed. He opens his mail impatiently, rips the envelopes more than they require being ripped, draws out letters to scan in mid-air as if it's a task he resents, applying his energy and attention and good will to something so inconsequential. But then isn't everything not Yvette inconsequential? The lover's dilemma, the lover's delight.

It's clear that he resents, generally, his hours in this house, the company of his wife, his frightened, adoring problem-son, clear that he yearns to be elsewhere, but where? — no one dares inquire. Are you angry with me, Helen asks, Why are you angry with me, Helen sometimes asks, please *answer* me, and Neil turns his distracted gaze upon her as if he has never seen her before. Though the questions are preposterous — though it is absurd for Helen to take herself this seriously — Neil manages, most of the time, a civil reply. No.

No, of course not, certainly not, he says, absently, kindly, sometimes stroking her thin shoulder, her arm — Of course not Honey, a soft consoling drawl, gaze already retreating.

(One afternoon he tells Yvette a story they both find sad, pitiable: Helen did not accuse him of being in love with another woman, Helen very carefully *declared* that he was in love with another woman, and if he wanted a divorce, if he wanted a trial separation, she would agree, she wouldn't cause legal or domestic difficulties, she wasn't, isn't, that kind of woman. Yvette, listening closely, wipes at her eyes, laughs nervously, says with a strained smile — I guess *I'm* that kind of woman.



Should they get married is a story adulterous lovers tell.

A long exotic convoluted story. With variations, modulations.

Yes, he says, but I don't think so she says, not right now. Or, yes he

says and yes she says too, but do they dare hurt so many people? He worries, she is stung. You don't care about hurting me, do you, she says, surprising him with her emotion. Plans are made, vague, like words written in steam on bathroom mirrors, the other wife is this, the other husband is that, in another month one lover will be, and Yvette is planning to (planning to spend a few weeks with her ailing mother in Sarasota, Florida, as she tells Neil, though in truth, as she can't bring herself to tell him, she is going to be operated on for a cyst, yes surely it will prove to be a harmless cyst, in her uterus, she simply can't *tell* him because she fears his fear and she fears his, well, disgust, she doesn't entirely trust him), and it's a difficult time right now, the stock market, interest rates so high, by the end of the year as Garrett predicts the rates are sure to start downward, it will make a considerable difference. Then perhaps they shouldn't indulge themselves in making plans except Neil is one afternoon so wounded, so furious, he leaves her without even making love to her, though in truth (as he isn't about to tell her) he's so upset he surely could not make love to her, not in his customary manly robust supremely triumphant way, and another afternoon Yvette begins to sob uncontrollably, Yvette hides her contorted face from her lover, Yvette is ashamed, ashamed . . . but of what? All these lying little maneuvers, all these games. Or, conversely, the fact that nothing means anything to her except Neil.



The story has to do with Garrett, good-natured sweet-tempered Garrett, Garrett of whom everyone is fond, and whom Neil dreads injuring, wounding in his pride (since Neil knows how he would feel, losing his wife to another man — and the other man a *friend*); the story has to do, yet more painfully, with Helen, poor Helen . . . who tells Neil that he should move out if he wishes then begs Neil not to pay attention to her, she loves him, she loves him so much, she and Mikey love him so much, doesn't he know? . . . of course he knows. Helen who has begun to see "some sort of analyst" in a nearby city, another woman (Neil says almost dismissively, not knowing how he sounds to Yvette), the two of them spending five hours a week (at \$100 a session) poking about in the frayed inconsequential memories of her childhood, as if *her* childhood matters in the slightest to anyone. Helen, poor Helen, of whom Yvette has grown obliquely fond, in fact Yvette is one of the few women in their circle who still likes, or can tolerate, Helen Schueler: that brittle sardonic woman with the bruised eyes, the twisty little mouth, Neil Schueler's wife who

has developed a truly bizarre mannerism of laughing silently, her eyes shut tight, and laying a meek little weighty little hand on her listener's arm... as if to beg sympathy, solicitude, she's actually in *pain* this is all so funny, aren't those tears running down her cheeks?... and then there's the problem of her coughing spells, her smoker's breath, her slightly weaving just perceptibly *floating* air after she's had, maybe, a single glass of dry white wine, and her big accusing eyes are black with pupil. She reports to Neil that she and her analyst sometimes discuss *his* childhood, but Neil hasn't any idea what they discuss since, after turning forty, he can barely remember having been an actual child, in the sense in which, more recently, his own son has been a child.



But the story they tell each other has most to do with children because of course they *genuinely love their own children*, wouldn't hurt them for the world, they're innocent victims after all, they must come first. Neil's son, Yvette's daughter. The precocious sixteen-year-old, the rather silly thirteen-year-old. One is obsessed with mathematical puzzles and games, and working with his computer; the other is obsessed with friends, telephone calls, clothes, whether she is pretty enough, whether she is pretty at all... whether she is *popular*. (She doesn't give a damn about her father and me, Yvette says sullenly — she doesn't know we exist.) Mikey is childish, demanding, emotional, unpredictable, a tough little shit as Neil calls him, a troubled boy as his mother calls him, who boasts of having no friends, boasts of being hated even by his teachers, locks himself away in his room for hours at a time, for complete Saturdays, Christ knows what he is doing apart from the computer, the math... the thinking. Neil has long given up trying to make sense of his son's preoccupations (what the hell *is* Infinity after all, isn't it just a pretentious word? — and what *is* Space/Time if you can't experience it?), he finds himself growing agitated, annoyed, if he's forced to listen to the boy's whining, self-absorbed, subtly reproachful voice. Well it's a sad story. It's a hell of a sad story. Spoiled by his mother and grandmother, made to think he's the center of the goddam universe, too smart for his own good, a born showoff, no wonder he hasn't any friends, no wonder he's never invited to anyone's house... and always his sly little air of reproach, reproach.

Still (as the story continues, month following month) both Neil and Yvette are acquainted with parents who have troubled adolescents, suicidal adolescents, kids who bring their friends home when their families

are away and very nearly wreck the house...yes it's rage, raw aggression...yes some of these domestic situations are really tragic.

In which context it might be said (though who but Neil might say it?) that Mikey Schueler's problems are not so *very* serious.

/ / /

Yes but should they get married, the lovers ask.

Yes but when. But how.

At what cost.

And isn't there a deadly risk in bringing the story to an end...?

The Bitter Woman

... Actually it is wonderful to be alive like this, says Helen's mother softly, actually it is...enough of a miracle...to be able to breathe deeply...to sit here in the sunshine and watch the birds at the feeder.

Yes says Helen, alert, attentive, staring out the window: two cardinals, several chickadees, a small cheery flock of juncos. God's in His Heaven and all is right with the world, she isn't bitter, she isn't sick with hatred, she *is* grateful that her mother has been recovering steadily from the operation, hasn't she been smiling since her arrival?

Smiling for three weeks, smiling dry-eyed, empty as a drum.

Poor Helen Schueler: she's the last, isn't she, to know.

... Vowed I would never be one of those people, says Helen's mother bravely, her fingers clasping Helen's, one of those older people, like your grandmother, you know, your poor grandmother...vowed I would *not*...be filled with self-pity...recriminations...talk of health, operations, who has died and who is going to die. ...No indeed, I am happy to be alive. Like this. Oh dear God just like this.

The warm dry bony hand, the thin thin old-woman hand, delicate as a sparrow's skeleton.

Helen is in White Plains taking care of her mother, Helen is trying not to think of Neil and his love affair (she's fairly certain by now, in September 1978, that the woman is Yvette Held — who else could it be?) and of Mikey, cruel impatient Mikey, who has told her she is "neurotic," "an old bore." Mikey who knows about his father, who has perhaps known for years. The shame, the disgust. The *shame*.

What shall I do, Mother, Helen wants to ask, holding her mother's hand hard, hard, feeling her throat constrict with the terrible need to cry — what shall I do, I love you but my love isn't enough to save you, to

keep you forever, I love Mikey but it won't be enough to save *him*.

Lyric

Neil, partly undressed, turns to see Yvette sprawled gracelessly across the bed, her hair in a tangle and her eyelashes matted, that coarse fleshy lovely mouth distended by a yawn, something kicks inside him, it has all been worth it, he thinks, both women, all of it, *all* of it, he'd do it over again, right now he'd like to tear the hot bitch open with his teeth and have done with all this ceremony.

The Experiment

It's only a Thought Experiment, it isn't "real."

Mikey's computer is programmed to emit signals *into the past*.

Mikey's computer is equipped with a self-detonating device.

Mikey's computer is instructed to blow itself up at, say, 9 A.M., the signal having gone out at, say, 11 A.M. *Will the instruction be obeyed?*

"Those Botticelli Eyes"

Methodically, cruelly, she fasts; she is triumphing these days in the disciplining of the "animal appetites"; proud and secretly gloating at the delicate pulsing of a blue vein in her forehead, the new intensity of her gray-green eyes. A cup of bitter black coffee trembles in her hand, she zips up an old pair of her daughter's jeans (too tight now for Sonya), she hears the telephone ringing but declines to answer (for what if it is Neil's crazy wife — she *won't* answer), she's already on her way out: a white-hot energy compels her, *is* her. She feels weightless, near-bodiless, innocent.

She fasts, it is her pleasure to fast, preparing herself, rehearsing, for a final — *final* — conversation with her lover (at this moment flying home from Atlanta, their plan is to meet at the new Hyatt Regency fifteen miles away, or is it at the new Hilton, so splendidly tacky, by the Turnpike? — there have been so many), though in fact they seem to have had this conversation before. But now she is in the ascendancy, now she is suffused with power, *now* she can make the necessary break.

And they will, or won't they? — make love a final time.

A ceremony of sorts. Romantic ritual.

Pots of strong black coffee, the telephone that must not be answered

(though there's the risk that it is Garrett who is calling, or even Neil with a modification of their plans), the sudden revelation in one of the household mirrors (though not a mirror Yvette customarily looks into) that her ash-blonde hair has been turning gray, silvery-gray, in secret, especially near the nape of her neck: that this is a fact about her others have observed in silence.

Yvette makes the observation with a wry shrug of her shoulders, tells herself she doesn't give a damn, she isn't after all the sort of woman who cares to deny her age, fight feebly against whatever age she *is* — she thinks too well of herself for that. (Also, she is still in her mid-thirties, six years younger than her lover and nine years younger than her husband. She may even be under the unexamined impression that this is middle age and she has already conquered it by an act of will.)

To think of herself is to think well of herself, for how could it reasonably be otherwise? — Yvette in one of her skinny translucent phases, looking anemic, fragile, something hot and tremulous about her mouth. (Beautiful, her lover says, has been saying for so long — beautiful he claims, a litany she takes for granted, worship of a sort, familiar and consoling — a beautiful woman. As if it were an accomplishment of his own, to claim her.) The story she tells herself is in itself consoling, though largely improvised, fantastic. The story she tells herself is that, one day, years ago, she was introduced to an attractive young couple, a very attractive young couple — husband sandy-haired, smiling, funny, wife quick and bright and dark and *sweet*, a female sort of flirtation: shall we — *can* we — be friends? — and she simply thought, even while shaking hands, exchanging pleasantries, joking with her husband, she thought: Him. It will be him. Whenever we are both ready.



She will, or will not, recover readily from the break with Neil; she will, or will not, know herself the victor (for, all sentimentality aside, all this crap about romance aside, there *is* inevitably a victor in such affairs); she will, or will not, feel intense guilt a few years later, when the Schueler's son kills himself. She will in any case urge her husband to accept his company's remarkable offer, made to all its top attorneys this year, of a six-week trip to Europe: yes they will take the Orient Express, yes they will stay in the perfect hotel in Venice, certainly they will fly to Morocco for a few days. . . .

No, they won't take the daughter, Sonya and her mother don't get along very well these days, Sonya has her own circle of friends, a very

tight circle of friends, Sonya wouldn't have any interest in touring Europe with Mother and Father. *Not on your life.*

Motherson

Mikey denies it all, denies everything, shrugging his skinny shoulders, giggling his mirthless laugh, the usual mannerisms — picking at his blemished skin, rolling his eyes as if he's in the presence of idiots, going suddenly mute, stubborn, a catatonia of the will. No he did not threaten thus-and-such; yes his teacher is full of shit, yes the whole school is full of shit, or does he mean (a contemptuous flutter of his eyelashes) *shits*: he's had enough of them.

And they've had enough of you, says Mother.

Okay I've had enough of *them* — that's the point.

But the point is also that they've had enough of you, they don't want you back unless —

I'm not going back. I said, *I'm not going back.*

Your father and I think —

I said —

Your father and —

Mikey begins to hum, his head bowed, bobbing, a queer rhythmic motion, hearing and not-hearing. The school won't take him back unless he apologizes and promises, etc., but how can he apologize when he did *not* say those juvenile things (wiring the place with dynamite, setting it off by way of a computer hook-up, Christ! — he's beyond *that*) or "threaten" (why is the word *threaten* always used, so corny, banal) to kill himself in such a way as to bring adverse publicity upon the school, any asshole (and the school is filled with assholes) would know he was only joking . . . he does a lot of joking . . . to relieve the boredom.

Don't lie to me, Mother says.

I'm not lying to you, says Son.

Please don't lie to *me*, Mother says.

I said I'm not lying to you, says Son.

I think you're cruel to make me so miserable I think you're sick, you need help . . . you've been contaminated by your father.

"I think you're sick, you need help," says Son, singsong.

You need professional help

"You need professional help"

Stop! Stop that!

"Stop! Stop that!"

Mikey, please —

“Mikey, *please* — ”

A giggling fit, a fit of hot enraged tears, Motherson pummeling each other, Mother slapping Son and Son shoving Mother, it looks like an embrace, an awkward dance step, and what of that frenzied giggling? — as Father enters the twilit room.

The Forgiving Wife

The MotherGrandmotherMother-in-Law in White Plains dies at the age of seventy-six, Helen discovers herself dry-eyed (she *is* empty as a drum and damn glad of it) while Mikey moons about the house sniffing and dazed . . . but tractable, civilized, *courteous* for once. And even Neil is struck by the loss, mourning (had he thought *her* mother was obliged to live forever just because *his* died years ago), tender with Helen, and consoling, and so forth, as if Helen needs, now, consolation, *now*.

It's a relief that Helen's mother is dead, she thinks cynically, because it spares her from knowing . . . certain details Helen would not wish her to know . . . now that the affair is over (Yes I can say that it's really over, yes I can say that I love you and I'm ashamed, says the repentant husband, frightened by something in his wife's face, oh yes *sincerely* frightened there's no mistaking it) . . . now that certain truths, specific and general, are being revealed. Such as: Neil had not really loved Yvette, he'd been going through a (is the word crisis? — psychic maladjustment?) — a difficult period in his life, professional primarily, all that pressure, that insane *competition*, too many aging Harvard Law boys under one roof, perhaps even some neurotic jealousy of his wife and son, *their* closeness, and wouldn't any father (murmured with a faint faltering laugh, a crinkling of blood-threaded eyes) be uneasy about having a son who is so — bright? So mercilessly bright? So much the whiz-kid? So much the — not smart-aleck, but what is the word — a precocious intelligence, brain — ah yes: *Wunderkind*.

Helen laughs, forgiving. All forgiveness.

Helen has it in her power to forgive, thus why not forgive? So she forgives.

(The Forgiving Wife)

She forbids herself to think *what it must mean* that her mother has died despite the fact that she loved the woman so very much . . . so painfully

childishly much. . . despite the fact that her mother loved *her*. (And who after all loves *her*, Baby is all growed up, or nearly.)

A lonely predicament here in the Void. Familiar but still lonely, not very comforting. She examines the Milky Way photographed and taped to Mikey's wall, yes these are lonely prospects, permanent-seeming though ostensibly "ephemeral" (how long *has* she been alive after all), and next year Mikey too will be gone, he'll make his escape, wait and see, already he flushes at the name Mikey saying Mother I *told* you my name is Michael, my name is *Michael* for Christ's sake *please*. A lonely predicament, wifeandhusband together at last.

She wants to cry for her mother but it's difficult, it isn't easy, this is a knotty convoluted "ephemeral" story she tells herself, raking her nails experimentally over her flesh to get a little . . . sensation: raw, throbbing, primitive, healthy. Her left forearm, her breasts, her soft flaccid belly. Numb for so long. Well why not be numb, dead inside, dead inside where it counts, not like Y. who luxuriates in lovemaking, laughs gasping for air, is drowning, dying amidst the smelly bedclothes, greedy for what he has to give her, tireless, insatiable, those hips bucking, pelvis frantic, old tricks Helen deftly performed a lifetime ago, Oh don't leave me don't stop don't leave me Oh Christ: *I love you*.

I love you, says Neil, only you, says Neil, and Helen says gently, her eyes turning in their sockets, I love *you*. It has always been you, says Neil, sobbing, huddling in her arms, you know it has always been you, I'd be nothing without you, and Helen says, suppressing her laughter, I know, I know, I've always known.

The Seven Bridges of . . .

It is Infinity of a kind: you begin (for instance) with the bridge at the upper left, proceed to cross the island, cross the bridge at the lower left; you then turn to the left, proceed to cross the next bridge, cross the island, cross the *next* bridge. . . You don't get very far, however, before the terrifying nature of the problem strikes you; and then it's too late. Then you must go back. Then you must go back and begin again, this time, perhaps, with the "horizontal" bridge leading to the island.

Mikey hasn't given a thought to the Königsberg puzzle for years, at least it seems like years, he has stopped thinking about many useless things, it is a function of "growing up." In fact he isn't Mikey now but Michael Schueler, respected if not greatly liked by his suitemates at Yale, admired in a way for his industry, seriousness, maturity . . . and for the

astounding fact that, at mid-term, he has straight A's except for his course in algebraic topology in which he has an A + . But suddenly he's tired.

Among his parents' circle back home he is, he's been told, a model of sorts; an *exemplum*; living proof should such proof be desired that a brattish neurotic *Wunderkind* can make adjustments to ordinary life after all, laying aside certain childish obsessions forever, behaving normally, "pulling up his socks" and so forth, some stories have happy endings. Never too late in America. Never too late in the upper middle class. His high school teachers and his guidance counselor are after all the sort of people who ache to be proven wrong, to be surprised in their dreary predictions, they *want* to see a lost cause suddenly find himself: and then the father Neil Schueler is such a nice guy, and the mother, that poor nervous woman, actually she's an *attractive* woman if you can see past the God-awful mannerisms. . . . she's said to have a Ph.D. or is it an M.A. in something like organic chemistry. . . .

Mikey Schueler the sombre whiz kid buckled down as the saying goes, applied himself diligently and tirelessly to his studies during his senior year, did so well on his SAT tests he was accepted at each of the four universities to which he applied: some stories *have* happy endings. So he went away to New Haven. So he is in New Haven at this very minute.

Feeling suddenly, unaccountably, very tired.

(Why aren't you applying to Harvard they asked him — teachers, Father — and he said something vague and flippant like: I was *born* there after all why press my luck and go back?)



It's Thanksgiving recess and his suitemates have gone home, in fact the college is nearly deserted, the silence is luxurious, why not stay another day or two? — Yale has an entire week off. He is scheduled to take the train home on Tuesday afternoon at two-fifteen but suddenly he's tired, exhausted really, there is bliss in his empty suite and in a bathroom solely his; he *is* tired from working so hard: four A's and an A + but he'll be embarrassed if Mother and Father make a fuss over him because (as he has been admitting to himself for weeks) the grades didn't come easily . . . no, they didn't come easily . . . and he isn't certain that he wants to live it all again . . . yes he's pretty certain he doesn't want to live it all again. His record is so very perfect, why press his luck and keep going?

In any case he can't go back home. Not to that house.

No, he *can't* go home, that's his first premise.



A perfectionist to the end Mikey knows how to skillfully sever (not merely slash at) the arteries in his left arm: a strong unflinching grip on the razor with the fingers of his right hand, the blade drawn lengthwise, deep and pitiless, exhilarated at the feat that can't be done (as Spinoza teaches all things desire to persist in their being) yet is being done, only observe. If this is dying it feels after a few minutes like goofing off as Mikey rarely allows himself, hiding under the shower in steaming hot water, or in this case hiding in the tub, the water splashing in as water drains out, cleverly timed, he has everything cleverly timed, he isn't going to be found until early evening when everything will be over. The door is locked, the steam is consoling, he's sprawled out ungainly (nearly six feet tall, only one hundred thirty-five pounds) but curiously relaxed in the tub, as if he has done this before, oh many times before, it isn't at all difficult once you've stated your first premise. Too cowardly or too shrewd to open his eyes for a while, he wonders whether there will be sinewy cords of blood, skeins that won't blend in with the water, or whether it is all a pale tepid washed-out pinkish-red, and then, suddenly, he isn't interested, he can't be bothered to check, he notes the peaceful unexcited heartbeat that feels like wisdom; suddenly he is crossing one of the Königsberg bridges, he's simultaneously in the tub amidst the noisy water and on the bridge above *that* water, he sees himself crossing the first of the bridges...and then the island...and then the second bridge...and this time he'll try something unexpected, how about proceeding at once to the horizontal bridge...and proceeding onward.

The Happy Ending

This is the final story they tell, this is *the* story, surprising and placating them both; one mild Saturday morning in early September 1983 when by accident Neil Schueler and Yvette Held meet in the Village Market, not having spoken together since approximately June of 1982: a story with a happy ending.

...so absurd, so *extreme*, Yvette says in a lowered voice, there were times I actually prayed for... well, *both* of us... you think such crazy things... for instance once when you were driving on the Turnpike I think and driving quite fast... and I had this little fantasy of pulling at the steering wheel... something, anything, you know... to make an end of it.

Neil listens fascinated, believing and not-believing, staring at a woman he no longer loves despite her Botticelli eyes (hadn't he once

called them that?) and her slender snaky body and something secret and sly and at-the-edge-of-frenzy in her voice, Neil murmurs, God did you really, God I'm glad you *didn't*. . . .

Well of course I *wouldn't*, it was just a fantasy, anything, you know, to make an *end*, Yvette says, smiling to show her good strong damp white teeth—you get in these extreme states of mind when you're in love or are convinced you're in love, it's something I have to remember now that Sonya has a boy friend, I mean a *steady* boy friend. . . .

Sonya must be how old now? Neil says, though he isn't interested: he wants to hear more about Yvette's crazy fantasy and maybe just maybe (well, maybe not) he'll tell her about *his* . . . strangling her with her hair . . . when she wore it long, long and loose, falling past her shoulders. Oh is she really that old, he says, slightly perplexed, I think of her as such a little. . . .

And Mikey's at Yale, someone said? says Yvette brightly.

And Mikey's at Yale, says Neil, grinning, swiping at his nose, thank *God*.

So they talk, chat. Laugh. A shock for them to meet after so long (and Neil isn't altogether certain how much Garrett knows) but after a few minutes it seems, well, quite casual, even ordinary, two friendly acquaintances meeting in the Market, lounging over their grocery carts, a familiar sight. Yvette is wearing something that resembles a burlap tunic cinched in rather severely at the waist, a belt with a big Navaho buckle, sandals, her hair is close-cropped, a mass of stylish frazzled curls, she's given to smiling a good deal, laughing huskily, not at all embarrassed or uneasy. Neil is wearing khaki shorts and a sweatshirt, he's sporty, tanned, unshaven, hopes Yvette won't inquire after Helen who is in one of her lethargic phases, staying at home day after day, unwashed hair, bathrobe, bare feet, grainy flaccid skin but she's *all right*, it's just a cyclical thing by now . . . hopes Yvette won't notice the soft roll of flesh at his waist . . . or the fact that his hair is thinning at the crown.

. . . working out for the best, after all, says Yvette.

Yes, says Neil, after all.

Those Botticelli eyes! — hadn't he once called them that in absolute dazed sincerity, framing the woman's face with his hands: and now he sees the fine white lines at the eyes' edges, now he sees the smudge of brown eyeliner on the lids, in any case he is immune, he certainly *is* immune, it's such an old hacked-over pondered-over story.

The thing is, Neil says carefully, his voice still lowered — that nobody was hurt. That's the important thing.

Oh I know, says Yvette at once.

That's the thing that matters most, says Neil, licking his lips, calculating when he should begin to edge his cart past hers — that's really it, you know, all the rest was —

Oh I know, says Yvette sadly, *I know*.

Paracelsus and the Rose

BY JORGE LUIS BORGES

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN THOMAS DI GIOVANNI

Volume 44, Number 2 Spring 1986

Jorge Luis Borges had other pieces, all translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni, in the fall/winter 1970-71 issue. He died in 1986.

“Insolent vaunt of Paracelsus, that he would restore the original rose or violet out of the ashes settling from its combustion . . . ” — De Quincey, *Writings*, XIII: 345

In his laboratory, which comprised two cellar rooms, Paracelsus begged his God — his unspecified God, any God — to send him a disciple. It was growing dark. In the hearth a meager fire cast flickering shadows. To get up and light the iron lamp was too much trouble. His mind dulled by weariness, Paracelsus forgot his request. Night had erased the dusty tubes and retorts, when there was a knock at the door. Drowsily, Paracelsus got up, climbed the short spiral staircase, and opened the door. A stranger entered. He too seemed exhausted. Paracelsus motioned to a bench; the other man sat down and waited. For a while, neither of them uttered a word.

The master spoke up first. “I can recall western faces and eastern faces,” he said a bit pompously. “I do not remember yours. Who are you and what is it you want?”

“My name doesn’t matter,” the other man replied. “I’ve walked three

days and nights to reach your door. I want to be your disciple. I bring you all my worldly goods."

He took out a small pouch and, with his right hand, emptied it onto the table. There were many coins, all of them gold. Paracelsus had turned to light the lamp. When he faced around again he noticed that in his left hand the man held a rose. The rose made Paracelsus somehow uneasy.

Sitting back, he put his fingertips together, and said, "You offer me gold, believing I hold the secret of the philosopher's stone, which turns base metals into gold. It's not gold I seek. If it's gold you're interested in, you'll never be a disciple of mine."

"I don't care about gold," the other man answered. "These coins are but a token of my willingness to work. I want you to teach me the Grand Secret. I want to follow by your side the path that leads to the stone."

"The path is the stone," Paracelsus said slowly. "The stone is the point of departure. If you don't understand these words you have not even begun to understand. Each step along the path is the destination."

The other man looked at the master with misgivings. "But is there a destination?" he said, his voice changed.

Paracelsus laughed. "My detractors, who are as numerous as they are stupid, say no, and they brand me an imposter. I disagree with them, though I may be wrong. Yet, there *is* a Path, I know."

A silence fell, into which the other man said, "I am prepared to go by your side however many years the journey takes. Let me cross the wilderness. Whether or not my stars allow me to set foot there, I want to see the promised land — even if from afar. But before I set out I want some proof."

"When do you want it?" asked Paracelsus, suspicious.

Suddenly decisive, the disciple said, "At once."

The two had been speaking in Latin; now they spoke in German. The young man held the rose aloft.

"Everyone knows you are able to burn a rose and then by your art make it rise again out of its own ash," he said. "Let me bear witness to this wonder. I ask only this, and then I'll entrust my whole life to you."

"You are most credulous," said the master. "But it's not belief I require, it's faith."

"That's just it," the other man insisted. "Because I believe I want to see the destruction and rebirth of the rose with my own eyes."

Paracelsus had taken up the flower, toying with it as he spoke. “You believe, then, that I can destroy the rose?”

“Anyone can destroy it,” said the disciple.

“You are wrong. Do you believe something can be turned into nothing? Do you believe the first Adam in Paradise could have destroyed a single flower or blade of grass?”

“We are not in Paradise,” the young man said stubbornly. “Here, beneath the moon, everything is mortal.”

Paracelsus had risen to his feet. “Where are we, then? Do you think the godhead could create a place other than Paradise? Do you consider the Fall to be anything more than our ignorance of the fact that we dwell in Paradise?”

“A rose can be burned,” said the disciple defiantly.

“There’s still fire in the hearth,” said Paracelsus. “If you were to throw this rose onto the coals, you would believe it to have been consumed and its ash real. I say that the rose is eternal and that only its appearance undergoes change. With a single word I could make you see it again.”

“One word?” said the disciple, full of wonderment. “Your still is cold, your retorts coated with dust. By what means would you bring the rose to life again?”

Paracelsus regarded him sadly. “My still is cold,” he repeated, “and my retorts coated with dust. At my time of life I employ other tools.”

“I dare not ask what they are,” said the other man cleverly — or humbly.

“I speak of the tool used by the divinity to create heaven and earth and the unseen Paradise in which we dwell but which original sin conceals from us. I speak of the Word, which the teachings of the Kabbalah reveal.”

“I beg you, please show me the disappearance and reappearance of the rose,” the disciple said matter-of-factly. “I don’t care how you do it — with your still and retorts or the Word.”

Paracelsus considered, then said, “If I were to do what you ask, you’d say it was merely an appearance forced on your eyes by magic. The marvel would not confer the faith you seek. So spare the rose.”

The young man stared at him, doubting as ever.

“Besides,” Paracelsus said, raising his voice, “who are you to enter the house of a master and demand a miracle of him? What have you done to deserve such a gift?”

"I know I've done little," the other man said, quavering. "I beseech you in the name of the many years I will study in your shadow to let me see the ash and then the rose. I'll ask nothing else of you. I shall believe the evidence of my eyes."

Abruptly, he picked up the bloodred rose that Paracelsus had left on the desk and cast it into the flames. The color went out of it, until all that remained was a heap of ash. For an endless moment the young man awaited the Word and the miracle.

Paracelsus displayed no change of expression. With a strange simplicity he said, "All the physicians and apothecaries of Basel claim I'm a fake. Perhaps they are right. There's the ash that was once a rose and will never be a rose again."

The young man felt ashamed. Paracelsus was a charlatan or mere dreamer, and he, the would-be disciple — an intruder — had burst in and was forcing the master to admit that his renowned magic arts were but a piece of vanity.

"What I have done is unforgivable," said the young man, dropping to his knees. "I lack the faith the Lord demands of true believers. Let me go on seeing the ash. I'll return when I am fitter and will be your disciple, and at the end of the journey I'll see the rose."

He spoke with genuine passion, but his passion was the piety inspired by the aging master, so venerated, so maligned, so illustrious, and therefore so hollow. Who was he, Johannes Grisebach, to discover with a sacrilegious hand that behind the mask there was no one?

To have left the gold coins behind would have amounted to an act of charity. On his way out, the young man gathered them up. Paracelsus accompanied him to the foot of the staircase, telling his visitor he would always be welcome in this house. Each knew they would never meet again.

Paracelsus stood there alone. Before extinguishing the lamp and sitting in his weary armchair, he turned the handful of delicate ash in his cupped palm and under his breath spoke one word. The rose sprang to life.

The Color Purple As Everybody's Protest Art

BY GERALD EARLY

Volume 44 Number 3 Summer 1986

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Reflections in the Darkness of the Theater

"But on the other hand, if you can believe I am in Africa, and I am, you can believe anything." — from one of Nettie's letters in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

T*he Color Purple*, by black feminist writer Alice Walker, is not a good novel. Therefore, one had every right to expect that it would make an excellent Hollywood film since Hollywood has never been able to make great films from great books. And because the film has been recognized rather lavishly with awards and nominations for awards, not to mention a very strong box office as well, it is safe to assert that the novel has indeed been transformed into an excellent Hollywood film. A book like *The Color Purple* lends itself to the glossy and excessively sentimental treatment that Hollywood is so capable of providing for its "serious subjects" or those endearing pop-culture literary attempts at some sort of social protest. *The Color Purple* offers Hollywood, rather

like a traditional trifle on a wedding gown, a bit of something old and a bit of something new. The old stuff is race, which, in this post-Dr. King age of a perfectly integrated society, where indeed a Negro can marry his white boss's daughter, is not only unworthy of any trenchant discussion, but scarcely worthy of notice. Blacks have long ceased to be exotic or exciting or even interesting, largely because it has been determined by an act of cultural fiat that, except as nostalgic objects of some ahistorical past, they no longer exist. Dr. Kelly Miller predicted back in 1925 in the *New York Amsterdam News* that the Negro race would die out, and I guess in the 1980s we can hear, to use an old black folk phrase, "the death bell toning." So, it is a perfect age to make a movie about race when one is no longer confronted with the question which side are you on? and racism is something that occurred long ago and far away. Feminism, though, is something quite lively and intriguing for Hollywood and it has been pursued by the filmmakers out there with all the naive gracelessness and enervating bathos that will eventually cease to make it an object of real thought but rather a shrewd diversion from thought itself. Feminism becomes for us through our films not even something remotely identifiable with a "social problem" but the mere cause for shocks and quakes to the nervous system, something to keep us from being bored that will become a part of the collected fund of contemporary boredom. I sometimes think the sole purpose of the film *The Color Purple* is simply to stave off boredom with, ironically but not unexpectedly, all the elements of boredom.

There has been in recent weeks a good deal of teeth gnashing and hand wrenching in some quarters of the black community over the film, Hollywood's latest treatment, among other things, of Afro-American life. One might almost be happy that this decidedly inept film had been made if the ensuing debate in the black community about the meaning of the depiction of black men and black women in American popular culture would produce anything like critical clarity. It will not. So black folk will simply experience another round of murderous name calling and posturing, the sort of emotionalism that passes for constructive argument in the black community, a place where many people still innocently think that mere outrage over insults means something in this world.

The Color Purple is one of such a long line of inept Hollywood films about black life — a cultural enterprise that started with King Vidor's *Hallelujah* in 1929 — that this sort of thing has become a cherished tradition. *The Color Purple* is a very bad film, so undeniably bad that one wonders how Steven Spielberg — its director — ever acquired any sort

of reputation as a competent artist. (I suppose it is, finally, its utter mediocrity that makes *The Color Purple* such an outstanding Hollywood film in much the same way that *Lilies of the Fields* was. In Hollywood films about black folk the powers that be usually hit what they aim for.) Spielberg is well considered because, in part, his films make enormous amounts of money, which means that they cease to be films at all and become entrepreneurial events. This ability to make money has always been consistently mistaken by Americans for talent or genius, depending upon how much money is made. Also, Spielberg is loved by American audiences because he makes very expensive B movies, which means that he combines hokum and splendor, that indeed he cares very much about richly etching the details of hokum, corn, and trash. As a result, he has bestowed an enormous significance on a mediocre art. His purpose is not to make the B movie any less mediocre but to make it a more grandiose spectacle. He does not remind me so much of David Lean or Cecil B. DeMille, who also loved the epic, the grand spectacle; Spielberg brings to mind the late jazz orchestra leader, Stan Kenton: give me a cast of thousands and I will give you not order but the degenerative excesses of order. This art of the maximum, which is supposed to heighten one's sensations by playing so blatantly upon the emotions, becomes in the end merely prosaic. Spielberg's films essentially have the same moral and artistic visions as a professional wrestling match: the experience of an exaggerated morality in an excessive spectacle that is, I think, not an experience of art, but an experience of the negation of art.

In *The Color Purple* clichés fall upon one another, trip over one another really, in such a tumble that one is forced to think that Spielberg was really directing a parody or a comedy and was not succeeding. There is no need to waste the artistic significance and power of such excess by taking it seriously; but apparently he does, just as Stan Kenton did in jazz orchestration. Sunrises and sunsets abound; children are seen running through grassy meadows of flowers that exist nowhere in the South of the black farm worker; Africa is the land of wild animals and huts. We even have a brief “coon” episode of singing in a church, a bar-room brawl, and a happy ending, this last being the only aspect of the novel that Spielberg used unaltered. And, of course, in Spielberg, as in the novels of Henry James, everyone has enough to eat and money is, at best, only a moral abstraction. The whole did not resemble a movie so much as an interminably long television program, which, I think, for Spielberg was precisely the point of all those clichés. They may not have succeeded as comedy but they did succeed in intoxicating the audience

with the comfort of things familiar. In the end, the film is like a very expensive, very large greeting card; and a card, after all, has no meaning except in the experience of receiving it. *The Color Purple* has meaning only in the experience of having *watched* it. The audience emerges from the theater in much the same frame of mind in which fans emerge from a wrestling match, saying collectively, “I cried,” “I laughed,” “I was angry.” It is not the experience of catharsis but rather something more akin to the experience of receiving therapy or counseling (the white 1980s version of mojo hands, voodoo, and St. John the conqueror root: psychoanalysis and self-help for the masses). The film does not purge one’s emotions or free one’s secret self; in short, it does not produce the true power of dream. It simply, in the absolute darkness of the theater, allows one to evoke endlessly a series of absolutely trite responses to a series of emotional, manipulative, trite situations; for the film does indeed trivialize its themes by condemning the modes of irony, ambiguity, and, ultimately, realism; so, instead of being searing, it is merely heart warming. And a chronically insecure American audience is reassured about its bourgeois pretensions and the moral integrity of the society itself. *The Color Purple* does not broaden one’s ability to respond but reduces it, and the audience finds this both charming and soothing. The characters on the screen have meaning only insofar as they provide this insular, protective, and narcotic experience for the audience. They mean nothing otherwise.

But the fact that *The Color Purple* might be dismissed as bad art, as kitsch, is, on one level, the least significant aspect of this quite important film. For what this film brings to mind more significantly is Richard Attenborough’s tribute-epic about a large portion of the nonwhites of the world: *Gandhi*, a tableau that actually has less to do with the life of Gandhi than with the white West’s romantic love of Indians. Gandhi sits in this film as a sort of centerpiece on an elaborately decorated table, resembling for the most part nothing so much as the late-nineteenth-century representations of Uncle Tom, the white West’s other famous gentle dark man. And probably for the western mind, Gandhi does indeed become the dramatic, ahistorical, fictional Uncle Tom of the stage plays: his Hinduism washed clean by its similarity to Christian beatitude and humility, his virtue being that he has endured nobly (like Faulkner’s Negroes) and thus can be petted perpetually by condescending whites. This supposedly historical film seems constantly on the verge not only of eschewing history but denying it. Years are denoted on the screen, but little can be made of the significance or lineage of the conflicts that are

dramatized; they possess no resonating depths. So history itself becomes worse than confused; it is utterly senseless. What is the meaning of the British raj? What is the meaning of the war between Hindu and Moslem? What does it mean to be Hindu other than, as the film simplistically and tautologically points out, that one is obviously not a Moslem? And what does it mean to be Moslem? This is not a question of whether history *ought* to mean something — a philosophical and theological concern that this film and most other commercial art do not remotely approach — but rather, whether it *can* mean something intelligible in this framework. Human beings, apparently saddled with both the responsibility and the need, must by virtue of their humanity make history bear intelligible meaning; otherwise why bother talking about history at all? So concerned is Attenborough with giving us the sweep and splendor of history that its meaning becomes not only displaced but irrelevant. History is simply a grand parade of picturesque, loosely connected events that fail to mean anything aside from being grand and having “changed the world” in some unfathomable way, largely because, one supposes, it was grand enough to do so. Attenborough’s film, like most of its type, gives us history as panorama. That is to say, history as an unintelligible spectacle of the making of history.

The Color Purple is not a historical film in the same sense as *Gandhi*, but it seems, by necessity of the setting of the subject matter, as preoccupied with history as any “period epic.” *The Color Purple* gives us a fictive historical sense by, like *Gandhi*, denoting years on the screen, arbitrary years to all appearances, to indicate the passage of time. But here the alienation from history and from lineage seems even more compelling and distressful than in *Gandhi*. The years roll by in *The Color Purple* and they signify nothing for either the audience or the characters on the screen. One can overlook such anachronistic details as Shug Avery playing a blues record in 1916 when blues did not become a recorded art until 1920, or Celie drinking champagne on a Jim Crow car in the 1930s. But what cannot be overlooked are those dumb dates themselves. Time, to paraphrase Rodgers and Hart, might just as well have stood still. The characters are totally untouched by history itself and so is the audience, much to its relief. The changes that occurred in America from the turn of the century through the 1930s (particularly changes in the American South) have no effect upon the characters. The financial fortune of Mr. Albert as a black southern farmer is not affected by politics; it is not even affected by the weather. The characters remain immaculate, severed from their parents as is true of characters in nearly all American films,

and signifying a purity, an innocence that white Americans wish to maintain in their view of their history, of blacks, and of themselves as a people. There is more than a bit of truth in the bitter assessment of this film by one black nationalist who said, in effect, that whites have been unable to portray honestly their own history in American films, so why expect them to handle anyone else's any differently?

But there is more at stake here than merely *that*. History has become for the white American that which occurs away from home and mother. And all changes that are wrought upon people are individualistic, internal, and inner-directed, never generated by the outward events in a society. Thus, this "liberal" film winds up purporting a very conservative ethic: we must all pull ourselves up by our own emotional bootstraps. The victim, in essence, cures herself. Even if it is argued that the brutal treatment of women by men is such a "universal" and ageless concern that it transcends history, we are then left, by such grandiose admission of true futility, with the utter impossibility of either understanding or changing such treatment. It would seem as much a mysterious given in the world as air, water, and light. It would be, in short, unintelligible. This view once again endorses another conservative ethic: the way things are is the *nature* of the way things are. This is a huge conundrum for both the film and the novel because neither makes an attempt to explain the nature of the problem or evil against which they are supposedly protesting. So the ending, which gives us the transformation of Mr. Albert, is not simply far-fetched, which would have been acceptable, but utterly impossible since nothing in his society as we are given to understand it would generate or support such a change. The question is not only why would he change, considering the social conditions under which he lives, but how could he change if his moral sense is so utterly and inexplicably debased? This is why, incidentally, considering the novel alone, a character like Joe Starks in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an infinitely superior depiction of a brutal, repressive, wife-beating, black man. Starks is a deeply complex man whose bourgeois aspirations we find, in spite of ourselves, to be attractive. And it is that essential attractiveness that ultimately makes the reader realize the horror of Starks's misogyny. Starks wants what every man in bourgeois culture desires: control, ownership, position. And the male reader slowly but surely grows to know that Starks is really himself. There is a great deal at stake in the war between the black sexes involving the man's sense of values and his ego and his refusal to lose face before other men; so much is at stake that the reader discovers in the end that men like Starks, and

that is most of us, would rather die than change. Starks does not give us much hope but he is not unintelligible.

But much as white Americans may find the great ahistorical sense of the film comforting, black Americans, I think, a significant number of whom liked the film, find it comforting as well. Blacks have shown just how much they have come to resemble other Americans in their alienation from their own history. Nothing indicates this as clearly as Black History Month where history becomes a series of dates and faces, notable persons who have achieved something noble or useful, and who are remembered in a vacuum seal of pious duty that simply announces itself as a sanctimonious unease with the past. What else has the celebration of Black History Month become but a spectacle as empty as the spectacle of transubstantiation in a Catholic church, the moment in Christianity when human history becomes divine? What else but a kind of secret loathing could characterize a people's labored and self-consciously defensive response to its past?

I think one reason many blacks enjoyed this movie is that it allowed them a certain luxury they had never truly experienced before: to see their past not simply as a story of noble (and local) uplift but as a kind of metaphysical triumph over history itself. *The Color Purple* has all the historical sense of "Cinderella," not quite a folk tale because there are no real folk in it, but a superbly realized feminist cartoon about a woman, victimized by cruel relatives, who is transformed into a princess. It is the triumph of the race without precisely being about race, so it has all the overtones of being "universal." And one has become "universal" in America when one's history is something one lives *through* but not *in*.

The absence of real folk only intensified the enjoyment for those blacks who liked the film because they were not reminded of their greasy, soiled, and messy past. This production goes out of its way to eliminate any trace of folk reality from black southern life. Consider the film score by Quincy Jones, one of the film's producers and a former jazz trumpeter and arranger who has gone on, in recent years, to fame and fortune arranging tunes for such rock and pop stars as Michael Jackson and Frank Sinatra, and issuing his own albums of bland, finger-snapping dance music. The music in this film is as bland, uninteresting, and offensive as anything to be found in any of Jones's albums. The horror of this is not that the score is anachronistic but that it absolutely *refuses* to be, in any way, authentic period music. Shug Avery, one of the film's principal characters, is supposed to be a blues singer during the early decades of this century, cut from the same mold as, say, Ida Cox, Victoria Spivey,

Bessie Smith, or Ma Rainey. In those days, as the autobiographies and biographies of such early-twentieth-century black artists as Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Willie “the Lion” Smith, Scott Joplin, and Sidney Bechet will attest, in black juke joints the songs were very slow (to give the prostitutes a chance to slow-drag their clients into arousal) and quite dirty — for example, this famous 1920s blues performed by Lucille Bogan (Bessie Jackson) called “Shave ‘Em Dry,” which, as one commentator pointed out, seems to out-Sade Sade:

Now your nuts hang down like a damn bell-clapper
And your dick stands up like a steeple
Your goddam ass-hole stands open like a church door
And the crabs walks in like people.

The rough audience at juke joints, consisting of prostitutes, pimps, gamblers, hustlers, and black men and women who had spent the previous week doing back-breaking work in turpentine factories, railroad yards, farms, and white people’s homes, would certainly not be interested in the sort of mild fare that Jones presented in the film. Regardless of Jones’s temperamental inclinations or artistic taste, he knows enough about Afro-American music to know that songs at least as outspoken as Ma Rainey’s “Black Bottom,” “Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll like Mine,” “Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya,” and “Hard Driving Papa” are true representations of black women’s blues of the period. He also knew or at least sensed that a soundtrack of authentic black period music would have alarmed and offended the black audience he hoped the film would attract. Louis Farrakkan, Jesse Jackson, and Benjamin Hooks, to name a few of our nation’s “black leaders” and keepers of the black bourgeois flame of achievement and respectability, would have been united in their joint denouncement of a score by a black man for a film directed by a white man that displayed such crude, vulgar, and “filthy” music. The silly music for *The Color Purple* simply underscores the discomfort with and the distance from their folk past that black people are unwilling to admit. And to deny that past, as this film does, is simply to say that blacks have no spiritual or historical genealogy. But what is truly crude and distasteful is not the authentic *vulgar* black music of the past but the insipid soundtrack of the film, which reflects an even more insipid and dispirited contemporary *popular* music that basically indicates that E. Franklin Frazier was right: the black bourgeoisie is nothing more than a class of philistines. Jacques Barzun explains the difference between the vulgar and the popular in European art, which I think is quite lucid and

applicable to Afro-American art as well: “What had been rough became falsely polished, pretentious, apish, and cheap. The common people of former ages had made folk songs and folk tales and had sung them themselves; the new plebs had cheap songs and cheap tales made for them by hacks in imitation of the high-class product.” (One can only hope that if the rumor about a Hollywood biography of jazzman Charlie Parker is true, Quincey Jones is not hired to do the soundtrack. One has nightmares about the possibilities of hearing dubbed solos by saxophonist Grover Washington or, worse, the Springsteen sideman, Clarence Clemmons.)

So the film has become for black people what it has become for everyone else: the ideal American protest art, freeing Americans from any criticism of their social or political order by denying that the film presents a problem open to any implication of a social or political solution. It is protest art that moves an audience without disturbing it, the most dangerous kind of narcotic art in many instances. And it selects as its villain the black male, the convenient and mutable antihero of the white American psyche for the past 150 years. There is nothing wrong with the black male being a villain in a film about a psychotic wife-beater, but it is too facile to be truly credible in a moral way. He is too easy a mark as the villain; and his villainy will, of course, disturb no one because the black male in America has simply come to symbolize all that is degenerate and pathological in the male himself. But those black men who have complained about the film are wrong: it is not an insult to black men. It is, indeed, a perverse tribute to them for it is their thundering demonness, their smoldering sexuality and the still pressing need on the part of whites to mask this in buffoonery that is on everyone’s mind. Toni Morrison was quite right in something she expressed in *Sula*: the black male will never suffer psychological neglect from white men, white women, black women, or themselves. He is always, in some way or other, the essence of the everything that is on every American’s mind.

And Reflections in the Light

“O Mary, don’t you weep And tell Martha not to moan.”

— Black gospel queen Inez Andrews’s “O, Mary, don’t you weep”

A good friend and colleague, Elizabeth Schultz, pointed out in passing not very long ago that Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* has a certain similarity to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* — something to

the effect that both novels have suffered from the popularity they have had to endure. I think she meant that both novels have been burdened by their pop-culture status and, as a result, both mass audiences and the critical elite have tended to misinterpret these works. The misinterpretations have arisen partly because these have been extremely popular works of social protest, indictments about the ways we live, written by women who, many believe, cannot really write, and so they have been subject to the most intense and awkward forms of admiration and suspicion. The popularity of the works has tended to blunt and distort the response of some critics by antagonizing their snobbish sensibilities, convinced as they are that these works could be popular only by pandering to certain mass expectations. For these reasons, among others, I suppose it is not surprising that my colleague should begin to think of these novels along the same lines. It may be the judgment of literary and cultural history that these books will be condemned to be yoked together and exist in that limbo of literary reputation between hack work and greatness.

I have said that *The Color Purple* is not a good novel, but it does articulate one useful observation that I can dispense with quickly. The book utterly condemns the black male's glorification of his pimp mentality, and for this we should be thankful. For an insufferably long time, the black American male has been convinced, both by himself and by white males, that he is the monstrous stud on our cultural block. It is one of the few contemptible misrepresentations dreamed up by the white male that the black male has taken to heart, has clutched feverishly. Perhaps he has taken an unseemly pride in this perversion because it has titillated some white women (which in turn has titillated him) or because it has endowed him with the power of the slave master and permitted him to turn his community into a kind of brothel with "bitches" and "'ho'es." Whatever the case, Walker was quite right in linking that attempt to the oppressive attitude of the slave master, to the attitude of a rapist. It is appropriate that the lazy Mr. Albert should run something akin to a plantation with a big house as he remained a pimp in his soul.

Despite this, *The Color Purple* remains an inferior novel not because it seems so self-consciously a "woman's novel" and not because it may be playing down to its mass audience, guilty of being nothing more than a blatant "feel-good" novel, just the sort of book that is promoted among the nonliterary. *The Color Purple* is a poor novel because it ultimately fails the ideology that it purports to serve. It fails to be subversive enough in substance; it only *appears* to be subversive. Indeed, far from being a

radically feminist novel, it is not even, in the end, as good a bourgeois feminist novel as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written 130 years earlier. Its largest failure lies in the novel's inability to use (ironically, subversively, or even interestingly) the elements that constitute it. Take, for instance, these various Victorianisms that abound in the work: the ultimate aim of the restoration of a gynocentric, not patriarchal family; the reunion of lost sisters; the reunion of mother and children; the glorification of cottage industry in the establishment of the pants business; bequests of money and land to the heroine at novel's end; Celie's discovery that her father/rapist is really a cruel stepfather; the change of heart or moral conversion of Mr. Albert, who becomes a feminized man by the end; the friendship between Shug Avery and Celie, which, despite its overlay of lesbianism (a tribute to James Baldwin's untenable thesis that nonstandard sex is the indication of a free, holy, thoroughly unsquare heterosexual heart), is nothing more than the typical relationship between a shy ugly duckling and her more aggressive, beautiful counterpart, a relationship not unlike that between Topsy and Little Eva. Shug convinces Celie that she is not black and ugly, that somebody loves her, which is precisely what Eva does for Topsy. For Walker, these clichés are not simply those of the Victorian novel but of the *woman's* Victorian novel. This indicates recognition of and paying homage to a tradition; but the use of these clichés in *The Color Purple* is a great deal more sterile and undemanding than their use in, say, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Together, for Walker, these clichés take on a greater attractiveness and power than for the female Victorian, since they are meant to represent a series of values that free the individual from the power of environment, the whim of the state, and the orthodoxy of the institution. The individual still has the power to change, and that power supersedes all others, means more than any other. Human virtue is a reality that is not only distinct from all collective arrangements except family; in the end, it can be understood only as being opposed to all collective arrangements. But all of this is only the bourgeois fascination with individualism and with the ambiguity of western family life, in which bliss is togetherness while having a room of one's own.

The heart of *The Color Purple* is this rhetoric of virtue from which its theological propositions spring. The novel is not representing Celie as a powerless victim simply to establish a critique of Calvinist or conservative Christianity, but to create an outright revolt against such inhuman orthodoxy. For Walker, conservative theology endorses weakness, is enthralled by it because the existence of a superior power demands a corresponding submission; an elect is nothing more than a collective of

power, an unnatural sovereignty symbolized first and finally by the Calvinist male God. Two separate concepts become fused at some point in this book: the subversion of Calvinist Christianity by its replacement, which is something like liberal religion, and the absolute elimination of evil. Thus the resulting necessities of two conversions in the book: Celie's transformation to self-assertion and human dignity denies a Calvinist world, and Mr. Albert's feminization transforms the power of evil. Walker insists on a theology without victims; this must, to be sure, be a theology in which victims can never be possible, dependent on a world where all are equally strong and where all are equally humbled. This is finally expressed in the novel through a fairly dim-witted pantheistic acknowledgment of the wonders of human potential that begins to sound quite suspiciously like a cross between the New Age movement and Dale Carnegie. Nothing symbolizes the overthrow of this male-centered Calvinism more than Celie's refusal, about two-thirds of the way through the book, to write letters to God any more. She writes to her sister instead. These quotations from various characters towards the end of the novel signify the coming of the winds of theological change:

I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. (Shug)

God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone — a roofleaf or Christ — but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like frees us. (Nettie)

I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To ast. And that in wondering bout the big things and asting bout the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident. But you never know nothing more about the big things than you start with. The more I wonder . . . the more I love. (Mr. Albert)

As we can see, the transformation of values among the book's characters has been completed by the end. God has been reduced, though made invisible and nonhuman in a way, and thoroughly accountable to creation. And everyone has, through conversion, been able to become his or her own minister, a community without leaders, all equally endowed with the light: from an oppressive ghetto of political and social unequals to a black Little Gidding.

What Walker does in her novel is allow its social protest to become the foundation for its utopia. Not surprisingly, the book lacks any real intellectual or theological rigor or coherence, and the fusing of social protest and utopia is really nothing more than confounding and blundering, each seeming to subvert the reader's attention from the other. One is

left thinking that Walker wishes to thwart her own ideological ends or that she simply does not know how to write novels. In essence, the book attempts to be revisionist salvation history and fails because of its inability to use or really understand history.

There is certainly no lack of history associated with the novel: its title and elliptically rendered episodes harken back to Jean Toomer's *Cane* (and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*); its speech patterns and love of anthropological folklore bring to mind Zora Neal Hurston (its specific imagery of swollen male bellies is a direct reference to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*); and the epistolary style, which may have emanated from the feminist's realization, as Barbara Christian points out, that "letters were the dominant mode of expression allowed women in the West," is more likely the result of the influence of Samuel Richardson's novels of innocent women in distress. And there is also a great deal of history within the novel itself, references to Harlem, Bessie Smith, African emigration, J.A. Rodgers, and European imperialism. The problem with the novel's historicity is that it seems false and unconvincing, a kind of obvious scaffolding. The bits of history seem undigested and set in the text like lumps. Like the film, Walker's novel, despite its historical references, really wishes to deny history by refusing to show what change and passage of time mean in a society. This is why the social-protest aspects of the novel, some nicely worked up bits of grim naturalism, are inchoate and why the utopian ending must exist. Walker decided that her heroine has no real way to work out her problems within the context of history. And salvation history becomes the utter supersession of oppression-history through the assertion of an unoppressed self. The problem this presents for the reader is that Celie does not find a convincing way to reclaim her humanity and to reassemble the values of her world.

It is equally difficult for Stowe to find a convincing way for Tom to reclaim his humanity and reassemble the values of his world. The difference between the two novels is that Stowe does not believe in the necessity of a world without evil in order for Tom to be a hero or in order for his virtue to mean something. Nor does she believe that salvation history is the supersession of the history of the world as we know it or the history of oppression; rather, she believes that we live now in salvation history. On the surface, one might say that the difference is that Tom (and Eva and St. Clair) are sacrificed for the *atonement* of the sin of slavery while Celie is allowed to survive and triumph (and so are the other major characters of the book) for the *supersession* of a male-dominated, oppressive world. Tom dies without changing the worst evil with which he is confronted:

Simon Legree. In fact, because he dies resisting Legree's will, he is really protesting against that evil. Celie lives as the victor, ultimately being the source of change for the evil Mr. Albert. Stowe knows from her experience with the abolitionist movement in Ohio and from suffering the death of one of her children that to rid this world of evil will not simply be the act of the good asserting itself, of saying simply that evil is impossible, but the act of the shedding of the blood of virtue. Walker is unwilling to accept anything less than the conversion of evil and this is because certain pointed theological questions never occur to Walker that are extremely important to Stowe: Is this world worth saving? Should it be saved if the price must be so high? Stowe does not question the nature of the price, as a good Calvinist-tinged Christian would not. A refusal to grant the price its proper respect born of its necessity and its nature would simply be Manichaeism. Walker refuses to see the necessity of the price itself and certainly does not appreciate its nature as any sort of heroism. Thus she will not have her characters pay it. It seems to me that no matter how much as modern readers we prefer this revised rhetoric of virtue, the Calvinist imagination has a greater grasp of the political and social cost of virtue, a greater sense of the drama of the existence of virtue in a fallen world. Stowe pleads just as strenuously and far more effectively for the humanity and protection of women and children and for the assertion of the values of the home against the values of the marketplace that have dehumanized and debased all human relationships. But her sense of history is greater, knowing that events like the Revolution of 1848, the abolitionist movement, the Fugitive Slave Act, and African emigration are the result of large social and political trends that affect *all* citizens. Small but significant changes, such as the son of Shelby freeing all of his father's slaves, come hard; utopias do not come at all. Stowe knows that conversions like the one experienced by St. Clair are rare; most people who participate in a comfortable social order will not change until they are forced to. *The Color Purple*, book and movie, has become everybody's protest art: an indication of our need to have a bloodless eschatology where there are no devils in the end, no evil that cannot be repented and, indeed, no final rendering up of things, because there will be no sin, only all of us simply going, quietly and softly, into that good light.

SEAWIND: A SONG

by Donald Justice

Seawind, you rise
From the night waves below,
Not that we see you come and go
But, as the blind know things, we know
And feel you on our face,
Seawind, come from so far,
And all you are
Or ever were is space,
Which fills us with this restlessness
That will outlast your own —
So the figtree,
When you are gone,
Seawind, still bends and leans out towards the sea
And goes on blossoming alone.

— after Rilke

Volume 45, Number 1 Winter 1987

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The Flowers of Boredom

BY RICK DeMARINIS

Volume 46, Number 1 Winter 1988

Rick DeMarinis teaches at the University of Texas, El Paso. This story was selected for *Best American Short Stories, 1989*. Another of his stories appeared in the spring 1991 issue of the *Review*.

"He would gladly make the earth a shambles and swallow the world in a yawn."

— Baudelaire, *Au Lecteur*

Lamar sits in his office near the end of the day looking out at the bent heads of the sixteen men who work for him. The men appear to be engrossed in a new manual that reviews company policy concerning the cost-effectiveness of redundant systems intended to upgrade product reliability. The product is a vital part of a proposed new Mach 3.0 bomber that carries the informal in-house designation, Big Buck. Big Buck will probably never be produced, or, if it is, it will most likely be awarded to a company headquartered in Texas, one-time home of the vice-president. Favors, like hard currency, are always paid back in Washington. The deck is stacked, as usual, and Lamar's company, Locust Airframes, Inc., is close to the bottom of this one. Still, this going-through-the-motions is necessary, and profitable in itself since the buyer — in this case the Air Force — picks up the tabs for these ritual dances the defense industry puts on. Lamar's sixteen men are part of the dance,

recently hired to fatten the payroll roster of Advanced Proposals Engineering (APE), the section of Locust Airframes whose mission is to bid for contracts. Lamar himself is a new man insofar as he has been promoted from the rank of Reliability Engineer Step III to full-fledged Manager. This has involved a change of ID badge color from tepid aqua to radiant orange, an upgraded wardrobe, modifications in demeanor, and a tidy jump in salary and benefits. Job security, of course, is still tied to the shifting sands of Department of Defense wants and desires, which are always creatures of the latest Red Threat scenario and not necessarily a realistic response to the international situation. Lamar has been around long enough to know better — thirteen years now — but he's impressed by his good fortune anyway. He now has his own secretary instead of having to share a pool typist. She is a new employee also, and has eyes for him already. Eyes, that is, for Management. Power, Lamar knows, is one of the more dependable aphrodisiacs. Lamar encourages a protective cynicism in himself, but he's only human and knows he would be stupid to look this splendid gift horse in the mouth.

The window in his office is one-way glass, allowing Lamar to observe his sixteen men while cloaked in smoky invisibility. The situation, Lamar muses, is analogous to that of a god, looking down from a screen of clouds at the unhappy mortals below who believe with touching urgency that their frenetic schemes and counter-schemes are extensions of conscious ideals. The god maintains this illusion in order to hold the level of human unhappiness constant. He ensures that the noblest projects of those he rules become the *means* of their unhappiness. *Lamar, Lamar, Lamar*, Lamar thinks, chiding himself for such bloated fantasies. *Where do you get such ideas?* He has a partial memory of where such ideas came from — a walk in the dark with a fallen angel — but no, that's literature, something he read years ago in college. In any case, the fantasy is benign since Lamar has genuine sympathy for his men. He knows, for instance, that he is also being monitored by middle management — carefully jealous men who are halfway up the corporate ladder and do not intend to be bumped by an ambitious underling who doesn't know the rules of climbing. *We are all in the same boat, friends*, Lamar thinks as he looks out at the round-shouldered men. *It's just that I'm on a higher deck than you.*

Lamar sees that one of his new men is hiding his near-baldness with wings of yellowish-white hair stretched over his dome from the thriving area above his right ear. The man is in his fifties and is lucky to have been

hired at all. This is likely to be the last job he will ever have in the defense industry. After the contract has been let to the Texas company the ax will fall and the sixteen men, along with Lamar himself, will be sent scrambling for other positions within the company. The bald man in his fifties will be cut loose. Age isn't his only albatross. His relatively high salary makes his tenure an impossibility during the austere period following a lost contract. And his chances outside the defense industry are nil. Companies that are connected to legitimate free-enterprise adventures, such as IBM, AT&T, or the small but highly efficient consulting firms, want no part of men who have spent their adult lives in the defense industry. Men such as Lamar's bald man are not what the want-ads refer to as "self-starters." Their ponderous, insouciant demeanor makes the personnel interviewers shake their heads in smiling dismay.

The bald man, Lamar knows, has been in the defense industry since the 1950s. B.S. in electrical engineering from Fresno or San Jose State, but has by now forgotten most of his elementary calculus and differential equations. He is what is known in the business as a "Warm Body." The Air Force, before letting a contract, likes to see a company have enough self-confidence to maintain a large, well-paid work force. This results in extreme over-hiring in the months before a big contract is about to come down. Lamar has been raised to management to preside over sixteen Warm Bodies. He doesn't mind — it's the system. But only the middle-aged bald man *knows* he is a Warm Body. The others are naive kids, a few years out of college, though the more intelligent ones are becoming restless. They glance, blindly, from time to time at the smoked glass of Lamar's office as if to ask, "Isn't there anything for me to *do*?" Sometimes the blind glance is sharply suspicious — premature inklings of what the bald man knows.

The bald man cannot do real work, anyway. No one expects him to. He, and others like him, have made their homes through the decades of cold war in places such as Boeing, Lockheed, North American, or McDonnell Douglas, where they grew dim and paunchy reading turgid manuals while dreaming of overseas travel, golf, or a resurrected sexual urge. If such a man is approaching old age and has given up on the vigorous pastimes, it's possible that the simplest pleasures, such as good strong bowel movements or freedom from stiff joints, occupy his reverie. He is terrorized now and again by the streaky pains in his pectorals and arm, sudden sieges of caffeine-instigated vertigo, or shortness of breath. He is probably well past caring about his wife's slow evolution towards

complete and self-sufficient indifference. Lamar is not without compassion for the bald man, who was born without ambition, though he once had all the appetites ambition serves. Now he just wants to stay comfortably alive.

Lamar is sympathetic because he knows that he is not substantially different from the bald man. They are brothers in the same tribe. Lamar's single advantage, he believes, is that he knew — and *liked* — the rules of the game when he first hired in, thirteen years ago. He seems to have been born with an instinctive grasp of what the system liked to see in a new man. Early in his career he learned how to appear innovative and energetic while at the same time assuring his superiors that these alarming qualities were empty of substance. And though he was ambitious, he understood the politics of ambition: never frighten the man immediately above you on the ladder; he is in an excellent position to stomp on your head.

It's a Byzantine institution, the defense industry, with its own rules, rituals, and arcana that confuse and frustrate the uninitiated. And yet it manages to produce weapons of ever-increasing sophistication. That some of these weapons do not work is beside the point, a quibble rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of the mission of the defense industry, which is, simply, to keep itself well nourished with Cost-Plus money, to increase steadily in manpower and physical plant, and to reveal itself to the gullible citizenry as an economic savior as well as a vital necessity in a dangerous world. In any case, most of the weapons *do* work, eventually, if not after the first production run of operational units. As long as the fabulous deep pocket of Cost-Plus money is reachable, the missiles will find their targets, the bombers will get off the ground, and the submarines will float. Lamar's Reliability Section is the arm of Locust Airframes that devotes itself to the creation of documents that further this notion. Reliability achieved through redundant components is costly, but as the number of additional back-up systems increases on a given piece of equipment, the theoretical failure-rate dwindles steadily towards the infinitesimal. It's as if men were equipped with one or two extra hearts, or had fresh, supple arteries ready to back up their old, cholesterol-choked ones should they fail. Reliability is the dream of immortality transferred to electronics, hydraulics, and structural mechanics.

With nothing much to do himself, Lamar now studies the stiffening necks of the younger men in his section. They are primed for significant action. They are bright, hard-working, and very well trained. The sys-

tem will blunt their keen appetites for real work and discourage their desire to understand their jobs better by gaining an overview of the entire operation of Locust Airframes, from design to production. Only a chosen few have such indispensable omniscience. And these few are never seen by men such as Lamar's. Soon, the better of these young engineers will become deeply frustrated and resign. Though Lamar is not old — not quite forty — the sight of the young engineers makes him feel a fatigue rightfully belonging to a man twenty years older. It's their clear-eyed visionary look, the look that tells you they believe in what they are doing and that it makes a real difference to the geopolitical future of the planet. They haven't understood yet that boredom is the soil in which they must grow, if they are to stay on. The soil of boredom is gray, which is the color of the walls, the desks, and the carpeting. Lamar has thrived in this gray soil, a hardy survivor, like mesquite, or wild rose. These moments of spiritual fatigue are few. And though he prefers to wear gray suits, his neckties are always bold. The effect is: Ambition Under Control.



Across the street from Advanced Proposals Engineering is a topless bar called The Web. Lamar comes here every day after work for a pick-me-up. The Web owes its existence to APE, its clientele consisting of engineers, secretaries, and the occasional manager. And spies. Lamar remembers a time here when two thick-set men in three-piece suits handcuffed and searched a man wearing an engineer's badge. "Spy," the bartender told him. "The Feds have had their eyes on him for months. The guy drank nothing but lime rickeys like it was summer in Havana. You can spot the type a mile off."

Lamar was required to watch a film, when he first was hired by Locust, that warned about spies. "The pleasant chap occupying the desk next to yours might be an agent of the Communist conspiracy." The narrator was Ronald Reagan — a young, pre-office-holding Ronald Reagan — and the tone of the film was McCarthy-era serious. The statistics given were certified by the FBI. "There may be as many as four hundred spies operating in your plant. Think about it." Lamar thought about it but never saw much in the way of suspicious activity. He never saw much in the way of *any* kind of activity, except in the factory areas themselves. But in the vast office buildings all he saw was the interminable browsing through documents by men fighting a grass-roots exis-

tential conviction that a cancer of meaninglessness had taken root in their lives.

Once a pleasant man from Hungary, a refugee, was hauled away from the desk next to Lamar's by armed guards. It turned out the man had not been totally candid about his political affiliations when he hired into Locust. He'd been a member of the Communist party in Hungary, before the 1956 revolt, though he'd renounced it shortly afterward. But he left this chapter of his life off his personnel data sheet. The man had a name the other engineers joked about—Dumb-a-link Banjo Wits, something like that. Dumbalink was a fierce and outspoken anti-Communist and an American patriot, but was taken away in handcuffs and never heard from again. Lamar had liked Dumbalink Banjo Wits and had called Security with the intention of telling them that the Hungarian made most of the engineers in his section look like fellow-travelers by comparison, but Security wasn't interested. "He fibbed," the bored Security man had told Lamar.

Lamar, lost in bourbon daydreams, hasn't noticed that someone has slipped into the booth and is sitting opposite him. It's his secretary, a tall, olive-skinned girl with hair so blonde it hurts his eyes. Her name is Theresa Keyser but she has told him to please call her "Terry." Lamar has fixed her age at twenty-nine, though her job application said twenty-five.

"So, this is where you disappear to," Terry says, smiling. Her blue eyes are intense and, it seems to Lamar, too confident.

"My second home," Lamar says, lifting his bourbon and winking.

"Meanwhile, dinner is in the oven in your *first* home."

Lamar is annoyed, but her smile is splendidly straightforward. It makes him believe that she is being aggressive out of nervousness. "Hell," he says, "*APE* is my first home," and she laughs the tension out of her voice and touches his hand.

"I'll have a gimlet," she says to him, though the barmaid, a topless girl with spiders tattooed on her breasts, has been waiting to take her order.

They have two drinks apiece, their conversation gradually changing from office-talk to the more revealing narratives alcohol inspires. Lamar learns that Terry has been married and divorced twice and is now unattached. He doesn't try to characterize his own decade-long marriage beyond suggesting that his wife's interests and his own have diverged somewhat over the years. He tells her this in a joking, cavalier manner:

his views of marriage are a mixture of fatalism and the always optimistic belief in renewable relationships. This is California, after all, the land of expected transformations. Terry laughs easily at his bittersweet jokes — maybe too easily — but Lamar appreciates it anyway. He likes her, sees that she is intelligent and that her expectations are sober and under control. He reaches across the table and touches her hand. She takes his wrist and applies brief but significant pressure. Her eyes, which had been bold, are now disturbingly vulnerable. *Jesus*, Lamar thinks, knowing that three bourbons and water have inflamed some old romantic notions, *here we go*.

The barmaid brings them two more drinks. “Compliments of the sport in the rubber sandals,” she says, gesturing towards a man in a black suit seated at the bar. The man is watching TV — a game show — and is wearing white socks and lipstick-red sandals. He is a Howard Hughes look-alike, trying to create the impression of “renegade genius gone seedy.” Even his stringy hair is long and unwashed. The man, sensing Lamar’s peevish gaze, looks at him and waves his swizzle stick. His smile is a yellow leer. Lamar knows something about that leer, has seen it before, and is about to tell the barmaid to take the drinks away when Terry returns the man’s swizzle-stick salute and says, “Thanks!” just like that, loud enough to make several heads turn towards their booth.

And then it hits Lamar that he knows the man in the rubber sandals. He was a high-level procurement manager for Locust, a few years ago. Lamar, in fact, had worked for him when he first hired into Locust. Then there was a big cutback and the man was caught in the middle of an in-company war of attrition. He lost out to men who were more adroit in making the company classify them as indispensable. “Voss,” Lamar says, under his breath. When Terry looks at him with raised eyebrows, he says, “Randy Voss. Used to be a wheel. He was supposed to be in line for company president. Crazy genius, they used to say. He must have jumped when he should have ducked.”

Lamar is a little rocky when they finally leave The Web. On their way out the door they have to pass by Randy Voss. “Departing so soon?” Voss says to them. Up close his yellow leer is a toxic stain. “The evening is still young, kids. Tell you what, let’s make a killer night of it. I’m still fat.” He takes out his wallet and taps the bar with it.

Terry starts to answer but Lamar takes her arm and pulls her along. What she doesn’t know is that the old ex-manager is a degenerate who thinks it would be nice if the three of them could get together in a down-

town motel, in the wino district, and play out some rank fantasy starring himself. Lamar has heard all the Randy Voss stories. When the man had power the stories had the glitter of outré high times. Now he's just flea meat, another unremarkable scum bag.

It's almost dark outside. Terry takes Lamar's arm as they cross the street to the Locust parking lot. "Are you going to come over?" she asks, leaning towards him.

Lamar looks at this watch. "It's late," he says.

"Do you care?"

/ / /

She lives in a fourplex, upstairs, the view of the ocean blocked by a new high-rise condo that has been painted the slate-gray color of the ocean under a winter overcast. "They know how to break your heart, don't they?" Lamar says, mostly to himself.

Terry makes Lamar a bourbon and water and a gimlet for herself. Lamar carries his drink in the palm of his hand as he tours the small apartment. "You do this?" he asks, nodding at a murky painting of a western scene.

"I'm afraid so," she says, modestly. "I take art in night school."

"Nice."

"Do you like the condor?"

Lamar leans towards the painting which is hanging over the sofa. A bird — it looks like a crow to him — is suspended in mid air above a lumpish roadkill on a desert highway.

"It's about to feast on that overripe deer," she explains.

Crow or condor, the bird seems incapable of flight. A stone bird with cast-iron wings. The deer is generic meat, a formless wedge of brown paint streaked with crimson.

"I call it *The Angel of Death*," Terry says. "But maybe that's too trite. I think I'll change it to *Feast of Life*. I don't know. I'm torn. What do you think?"

She is standing close to him. He can see her lungs move as she breathes, the rise and fall of her sweater. He begins to see her details: the small nearly black mole just above her collar bone, the finely scented neck-hair, the lovely cut of her lips and nostrils. He slips his arm around her and she looks up at him, lips parting for the kiss. He kisses her chilly lips, and then they both put down their drinks and kiss again, with heat.

"I vote for *Feast*," he says. "*Feast of Life*."



Lamar wakes from a dream frightened, unable to tell himself where he is. He is reasonably sure he is not home. The rumble of traffic outside is not familiar. His heart is beating light and fast, like an engine in too high a gear to have any power. His fear begins to escalate into panic. It's happened to him before. He has a method of calming himself down. He begins with his name, the color of his hair and eyes, the ghost-white scar on his left forearm. He makes a list of keystone events: the year he was born, the years he graduated high school and college; the year he got married, and the name of the town he and his wife had eloped to. In this way he gradually finds himself. He reaches over and touches the woman next to him. She makes a sound he does not recognize as she turns over to face him.

"Theresa Keyser," he says, not *addressing* but naming her.

"Are you still here?" she says, picking up her clock radio to study its dial. "Shouldn't you get home?"

His memory, set in motion by the emergency Lamar has declared, continues to fill him in: an image of the man he had forgotten about, the degenerate ex-manager, Randy Voss, comes to him unbidden. Voss is saying something to him. They are walking, ten or more years ago, near an assembly-and-checkout area of the plant. Missiles on huge transport vehicles are slipping slowly out of a black building. It is a rainy night. Voss is laughing — *crazily*, Lamar thinks. "Nobody knows jack-shit," Voss is saying to Lamar. "If you are going to stay in this business, you've got to remember that. Something else, something besides men and machines gets all this fancy work done."

Lamar, watching the glistening missiles slide through the rain, thinks he understands what Voss is telling him. A missile, a bomber, a sub, they are all jigsaw puzzles, the pieces made all over the country. The men who make the individual pieces don't know — or need to know — the purpose of their work. The pieces are assembled by other bored functionaries who are also ignorant of the big picture.

"I see what you mean," Lamar says.

"No you don't. You really don't." Voss says. "What I am telling you is that there is a great dark . . . *consensus* . . . that sweeps things along to their inevitable conclusion. There is an intelligence behind it, but, believe me, it is not human. It is the intelligence of *soil*, the thing that lifts trees and flowers out of the ground. I am too astonished and thrilled to be frightened by it."

Lamar saw, even then, that Randy Voss was crazy, but what he had said made a lasting impression. And over the years he has come to adopt Voss's idea as his own. But it was something he was unable to talk about to anyone else, even his wife. How could you convince anyone that in this industry no single individual, or group of individuals, suspects the existence of a vital *sub rosa* mechanism that produces and deploys our beautifully elegant weapons? How could you *say* to someone that the process is holistic, that a headstrong organic magic is at work or that a god presides?

The Peking Express: Train Number 16

BY PAUL THEROUX

Volume 46, Number 2 Spring 1988

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And then there were a number of public events that shocked the country. I did not set off immediately. It is so easy to be proven wrong in China. No sooner had I concluded that China was prospering and reforming, that people were freer and foreign investment rising, than the country was in crisis. True, some aspects of China never changed—the rice-planters bent double, the weeder on his stool, the boy pedaling his two-thousand-year-old irrigation pump, the buffalo man, the duck-herd. But in the months before I left Canton to resume my Chinese travels, the yuan was devalued by 30 percent (instead of three to the dollar there were now almost four); and the black market in hard currency was very brisk, and the most common greeting *Shansh marnie*? People were criticized for wanting to go abroad, and a law was passed requiring potential students to post a bond of 5,000 yuan—an enormous sum—before they could study in another country. Foreign investment dropped by 20 percent, and Deng Xiaoping criticized Chinese manufacturers for producing shoddy goods that no one wanted.

And the students demonstrated, for the first time since the Cultural Revolution. The demonstrations were orderly, but the defiance implicit in such illegal gatherings was seen to be a sign of chaos. The Chinese

horror of disorder made them seem important, though I felt the parades and demands were mostly half-baked. Traditionally, December and January have been regarded by the Chinese as appropriate months for disruption, and so there was a ritual end-of-term element in the demonstrations, high spirits, funny hats, a measure of farce. The grievances were numerous, and on posters and in their chantings the students demanded press freedom, electoral reform, a multiparty system, and official permission to demonstrate. Banners reading *We Want Democracy* were flown. They demanded sexual freedom and better food in the university cafeterias. Eight cities were affected, and the size of the demonstrations varied from a few hundred students in Canton to well over a hundred thousand (and an equal number of spectators) in Shanghai, which came to a standstill for a full day.

The Chinese government, with its liking for scapegoats (so much more economical than a full-scale witch-hunt), blamed one man for the country-wide outbreak. This was Dr. Fang Lizhi, an astrophysicist and vice-president of the National Science and Technical University in Hefei. He had been very busy. He had written articles in *China Youth News* criticizing students for having “low democratic consciousness.” He lectured his own students at Hefei, and just a month before the demonstrations he had addressed students at Jiaotong University in Shanghai.

Dr. Fang’s message was a mixture of noble sentiments and platitudes. Among other things, he said, “Men are born with rights—to live, to marry, to think, to receive an education,” and that the only way for China “to transform the feudalistic ideas and gradually approach modern standards in thinking” was for its intellectuals “to demonstrate the strength they possess.” He implied that government leaders were not above criticism.

“Democracy can be achieved only gradually through consistent effort,” he said. “There is nothing to be afraid of. Criticizing government leaders is a symbol of democracy. I hold the view that we may criticize leaders.”

The abusive term for such sentiments is “bourgeois liberalism”—a sort of selfish and privileged complaining. Soon after Dr. Fang gave the speech, the *People’s Daily* attacked “the trend towards bourgeois liberalization.” In the Chinese mind a person who holds liberal views is a rightist and a person who toes the party line most strictly is a leftist.

Dr. Fang was vilified. Taiwan was blamed for fomenting trouble. The government papers said it was partly the work of “professional hooligans.” In Shanghai a worker at a lacquerware factory was arrested as a

counter-revolutionary for establishing his own political party, the *Weimin* (Defend the People) party. He was the only member of this party, but still it was no joke. Starting your own party meant that you intended to overthrow the Chinese Communist party. That was treason, and the penalty for it was a bullet in the neck.

The very fact that the demonstrations were mentioned in the news was a sign that the government was alarmed. It was fairly well known that one of the demands of the Peking students was that the demonstrations would be reported in the newspaper. Disturbances of any kind had been hushed up in the past. At first the government sent water trucks to Peking's Tiananmen Square at four in the morning. The paving stones were drenched, and the ice that resulted seemed like a guarantee that the students would fall down when they tried to march. But three thousand students appeared later that morning and kept their footing, and when thirty-four were arrested and hauled off to be interrogated another demonstration was mounted; more signs, more slogans, and the thirty-four were released.

The most worrying thing for the government was that in Shanghai both factory workers and students—not natural allies—had come together and marched in the same parade. To ingratiate themselves with the factory workers, the government blamed the students. The mayor of Shanghai addressed a large gathering of students and was heckled. "Who elected you?" a student called out. That was regarded as very shocking, because it is a total lapse of taste to suggest that someone like the mayor (who is appointed by the central government) is a party hack.

The demonstrations were peaceful. Furthermore, they were essentially supporting Deng's policies of reform. "Bourgeois liberalization" was just what the government had been encouraging. But the government did not want to be seen this way, permitting arch-unrepentant capitalist-roaders, behind-the-scenes reactionaries, harbingers of feudalism, running dogs, those left in form but right in essence, and promoters of the right-deviationist wing—to use the convenient Chinese categories—to flourish. It was, as far as I could see, the most recent example of the Chinese not knowing when to stop—first the government, then the students.

There was a suspicion that behind it all was a power struggle in the Chinese leadership. The students were being manipulated, not by Dr. Fang (who was fired from his university job and then expelled from the party), but by leftists who wanted to discredit the reforming rightist Dr.

Deng. Or was it the rightists who were inciting the students in order to provoke the leftists into overreacting?

I decided to find out for myself.

On a hot muggy winter day in Canton I went to Zhongshan University, south of the city on the opposite bank of the Pearl River, to see whether the students were still rioting. They were not. It was very placid under the eucalyptus trees. The students were cycling and punching volleyballs and jogging. They were doing their laundry, they were smooching, they were studying. Some of them stared at me. They had few inhibitions. They even talked about the demonstrations. They said their own professors were critical of the government and especially the official policy of suppressing or misreporting the news.

“How do they know it’s misreported?” I asked.

“Because we know the truth,” a student said. “We listen to Hong Kong news here.”

The Hong Kong stations came in loud and clear in Canton, and some Hong Kong newspapers circulated in the city, as well.

A student who called himself Andrew—he was a Cantonese fellow named Hen To—said, “I’ll tell you anything you want to know about the demonstration here.”

I liked his attitude, but there was not much to tell. He said the students in the south were complacent and money-minded, not furiously political as in the north.

“We only had two hundred students in our demonstration,” he said. “After they made a fuss here they marched to the government offices in town and sang songs. It wasn’t much—not as big as Shanghai or Peking.”

“What did the students say they wanted?”

“Democracy and reform,” Andrew said.

“But China is changing very fast,” I said.

“That’s what the old people think,” he said. “We young people say it is changing too slowly. But that is the government policy. They want China to look stable so that foreign investment will be encouraged. No one will put money into China if there are riots.”

I asked him his plans.

“I’d like to take up business,” he said. “Import and export.”

“You might make a lot of money.”

“I hope so.”

“Then you’ll become a capitalist-roader.”

"Maybe," he said, and snickered. "I think we have a lot to learn. We want to use the good features of capitalism but not the bad ones."

"Is that possible?"

"We can try."

That was the new thinking — "To be rich is glorious," a politically okay slogan. It was the philosophy of the young, of the rising students, and even of many farmers. It was the essence of Deng's thinking, too. It was in total opposition to Mao's philosophy, and it was one of the reasons Shaoshan had no visitors.

Andrew saw himself as an individual, with his own needs and desires. He didn't say what every student had said for the past thirty-five years when asked about their ambitions: "Serve the people." He said "business," "money," "import-export." He was fairly open-minded. He studied hard. He liked his fellow students. He lived in a room with seven others and did his homework in the library. His favorite author was Mark Twain. In the movie theater on campus (built by a Hong Kong tycoon named Leung) he had seen *On Golden Pond*, *Superman*, and *Rambo*.

I said that *Rambo* represented everything that I loathed.

"But he is strong," Andrew said. "His body is interesting. The way he looks. The things he does."

That was a point, the freakishness of it; but I said, "Do you realize that it was about Vietnam?"

"Yes."

"So doesn't that make it a reactionary, bourgeois, violently imperialistic movie?"

Andrew shrugged and said, "We don't take it that seriously."

He was twenty-one years old. His parents, as teachers, had been singled out during the Cultural Revolution.

I said, "They were The Stinking Ninth."

"Yes," he said. He knew exactly what I meant. Mao decreed nine categories of enemy: landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, rightists, traitors, foreign agents, capitalist-roaders, and — The Stinking Ninth — intellectuals. It is a strange list, because it seems to embrace the whole of humanity.

His parents had been rusticated — sent shoveling. They had fared better than the brother of my friend Miss Zhong, who had been locked in a broom cupboard right here at Zhongshan University by Maoists. His crime was that he was the son of a man who had once been a Guomin-

dang politician. He was kept in the broom cupboard for two years and, after a severe interrogation, hanged himself.

I told Andrew the tale. He said that it was not an unusual story. Well, that was true enough, but it made me feel once again that wherever I was in China, I was among ghosts.

“Do you believe in ghosts?” I asked.

“No,” Andrew said, and I could tell that he meant it.

He wasn’t superstitious, he wasn’t spiritual, and he certainly wasn’t political—there was no future in Chinese politics. He was practical. His was the first generation in China to grow up with no dogma—no emperor, no gods, no chairman; no Taoism, no Maoism, no Buddhism. Nor had Andrew’s generation been touched in the least by Christianity. Democracy was such a long shot that Andrew had not bothered to take part in the student demonstrations. His realism was a kind of glumness.

That night I wondered what would become of him. But of course it was very obvious. If he went into business and made some money he would prosper in a small way and raise a one-child family. He would not use expressions like *Serve the people*. He would regard himself as an intellectual (*zhishi fenzi*), the grandiose term the Chinese use for anyone who does not work with his hands. If he was self-employed, as he wanted to be, he would probably work hard. On holidays he would visit hotels like mine, where they had “holiday specials”—Christmas banquets, New Year’s parties (“free hats, favors, racket-makers”), and a “New Year’s Day Champagne Brunch Buffet” at 28 yuan a throw.

One of the worst aspects of living in brisk, dictatorial China is that you seldom have an accurate idea of what is really going on. It is not that the Chinese government is inscrutable. Lazy travelers and visitors love Chinese mysteries, but the Chinese are quite knowable. And Chinese bureaucrats are among the most scrutable and obvious on earth. And yet anyone must find the Chinese media obfuscatory and unforthcoming. The Chinese people manage to keep abreast of events by depending on telepathy and whispers, and by the politburo hyperbole: if a high official is said to have a cold he’s likely been fired; if he is “convalescing” he has been exiled; and if he is “extremely ill” he is about to be murdered.

And liberal does not mean liberal or open-minded. The connotations of the term, which is based on the Chinese characters for freedom (*ziyou*), are entirely negative, implying license or licentiousness. A Chinese official and most American Republicans would agree on what the word *liberal* implies. For Mao it was a term of abuse.

Meanwhile, the fuss over the students had not died down—the government was still ranting. But there was no public defiance. The Chinese had that squinting wind-in-the-face expression that they assumed when they were at their most resigned. No one on earth is more silent than a silent Chinese. I asked my usual provocative questions, but made little headway. I was sure a power struggle was in progress, because the eighty-three-year-old Deng Xiaoping had still not named his successor.

A Hong Kong student at Canton Station told me, “The government has denied there is any problem.”

“Then there must be a problem,” I said. “Never believe anything in China until it has been officially denied.”

We were waiting for the Peking Express on this humid winter night in Canton. It was said to be one of the best trains in China. It was the old Huguang Railway Line. This was a thirty-six-hour trip—two nights on the train, which went 1,500 miles, passing through five provinces, bisecting China from bottom to top and crossing the Yangtze River at Wuhan.

Some visitors to China laugh when you tell them you’re taking a two-day trip on a train, and then they are delayed for five days at a Chinese airport, waiting for the fog to lift. Everyone who takes a plane in China has an airplane tale of woe.

The only bad moment the train passenger has is on the platform, when the other passengers are boarding. Which ones will be in your compartment? It is a much more critical lottery than a blind date, because these people will be eating and sleeping with you. I had seen lepers on trains, and bratty children and, on the way to Guilin, a man traveling with five parrots and no cage.

I watched the people boarding. The old woman in the padded jacket, carrying a lunch tin—some pungent stuff in there, chicken-foot stew, Cantonese cow tendon, and highly prized rotten eggs wrapped in seaweed. There was a spiv in sunglasses with a radio, a man with three suitcases and a crate of bananas; a salesman with his case of samples—rubber bungs, probably; three ornery mustached men wearing high-heeled shoes; a small family—haggard father, mother with pin-curl perm, and spoiled child snatching at things that moved. The harassed spiky-haired student, the fat-faced party hack in the Mao suit, the secret

drinker with swollen eyes, the pretty girl traveling with her dragon-like grandmother, the plump boys in new eyeglasses from Hong Kong, the physics prof on his way to a conference, the loud-voiced Chinese-American who speaks only a few words of Cantonese but uses them on everyone, the middle-aged Japanese couple, looking wrinkle-proof but anxious, the students returning from overseas loaded with duty-free presents, western clothes, and a musical suitcase, the skinny, smiling, and lovably ineffectual-looking soldiers of the People's Liberation Army—it is impossible to feel threatened by soldiers whose uniforms are four sizes too big.

I was assigned to a compartment with some salesmen. One was the Chinese version of Willy Loman, and another was a frisky man who smiled too much and said, “I’m in machine tools,” just as his American counterpart would do. There was a third man who was practically invisible, reminding me of how the Chinese to a large extent have perfected the art of living at close quarters.

Mr. Yeo, the machine-tool man, admired my sweater (“Nice one. Good quality. Very warm. You’ll need it in Peking”) and was full of direct questions: “You’re—what? About thirty-five? Any children?”

He handed me an envelope of pemmican, as a sort of get-acquainted gift, shared his tea with me, and accepted a chocolate bar in return. I thought he might be exhaustingly friendly, but he slept through most of the trip and snored loudly. The Willy Loman character also slept a great deal, but woke at four in the morning and did lazy calisthenics, wagging his head and slapping his forearms. He was in foodstuffs and cereals. His luggage—both boxes and suitcases—filled the luggage shelf. He was very solemn except when I caught his eye. Then he broke into a laugh and gave me a broad smile. His laugh was urgent and meant: *No questions, please!* As soon as he turned away he frowned. That was also very Chinese.

The first night there was a tremendous amount of snoring in our compartment. From time to time it woke me with its flapping wind. It was louder than the clanging wheels of the train. But I slept soundly the rest of the time and didn’t get up until nine.

The train was so cold that morning the windows were streaming with condensation. I shaved in cold water—but it was always cold—and in midmorning we arrived at Changsha, where I had been some months before on my way to Mao’s birthplace. It had been steamy and dismal in the summer. In the winter it was smoggy and brown and much uglier. The words *a Chinese city* had acquired a peculiar horror for me, like

Russian toilet, or Turkish prison, or journalist's ethics. In the cold rain of winter, with the cracked and sooty apartment houses, the muddy streets, the skinny trees and dark brown sky, Chinese cities are at their very worst.

But this city was the signal for the attendants to stoke the fires, and as soon as the coach was reasonably warm the passengers threw their clothes off and clomped around in plastic shoes and wrinkled pajamas. They propped themselves in the draft between the coaches and brushed their teeth. Some practiced t'ai chi in the corridors.

The dining car was crowded at lunch time. Although there were no tourists on the train and everyone wore old clothes—shouting and spitting and blowing smoke into each other's faces—they were also flinging money around. I guessed that they were mainly Cantonese, on this profitable business route: Guangdong was a producer of goods and Peking a lucrative outlet. These scruffy passengers were all in business. The man next to me paid almost twenty yuan for a meal for himself and his wife. Call it five bucks and it doesn't seem much; but for a Chinese it was nearly a week's pay. He was a grizzled man with matted hair. He smoked and ate at the same time—chopsticks in one hand, cigarette in the other. His small boy did not eat. This little irritant dug out all the toothpicks from the plastic holder and threw them on the floor; then tipped over a glass of water; and then began smacking an ashtray against the table and squawking. He was about five or six. His father laughed at this obstreperousness—very un-Chinese. But that was not the only uncharacteristic behavior in this rowdy train. It was also full of drunks, and not only beer drinkers, but also old men getting plastered on the rice wine they had brought with them.

I read and dozed and woke up in the north of Hunan, at the city of Yueyang, which was a gray town surrounded by fat, shadowy mountains. A few hours later we came to Wuhan. I had been there once before, in 1980. It had seemed to me a nightmare city of muddy streets and black factories, pouring frothy poisons into the Yangtze. It was bigger than I remembered, but not so black. There were dozens of high-level cranes putting up new buildings, including a hospital.

The Yangtze is almost a mile wide at Wuhan, and on its banks it has landing stages and flights of steps that resemble the ghats on the Ganges. On the Hankou side there were also many new buildings, and there were cars in the streets—I remembered the wagons and carts, pulled by old women. The buildings and the traffic jams were not necessarily improvements, but they made a difference. Modernization did not make

any Chinese city look less horrific; many cities looked more so as a result of building schemes.

It was cold enough in Wuhan for people to be wearing mittens and boots. That was what the salesmen in my compartment were wearing when they got out, pulling their suitcases through the windows. They did it clumsily. They were bemused by the sight of a girl walking along the platform, carrying a dead fish.

Before we pulled out of Wuhan the sleeping-car attendant roused me and said I had to move.

“You are in the wrong berth,” she said.

“I am in the right berth,” I said. I knew she wanted to move me, but I saw no reason she should put me in the wrong. I made her compare my ticket with the berth number, and I created a hoo-hah, so that I would have the satisfaction of hearing her apologize.

“It is a mistake,” she said ambiguously, and led me to a compartment that held a man, a woman, and an infant.

“How old is that baby?”

“Two weeks.”

The baby was snoring. After a while it began to cry. The man took a bottle out and fed it, and the child’s mother left the compartment.

That was how it went. The man did everything for this baby, which was wrapped in a thick quilt like a papoose. The man fed it, changed it, and dandled it. The woman hung around and lazed, and several times I saw her sleeping in the Hard Class coach that adjoined ours. Perhaps the woman was ill. I did not want to ask. The man took charge.

“It’s a boy,” he said, when he was feeding it.

I hadn’t asked.

He was a doctor. His wife was also a doctor. He worked in Peking, his wife in Canton; and he had gone to Canton to be present for the birth. Now they were all going to Peking for a few months—the woman’s maternity leave. There were feeding bottles, baby powder, and cans of soluble milk formula all over the compartment. They used disposable diapers, which they discarded in a bucket under my bed. I did not mind; I like the milky smell of babies, and I was very touched by the love and attention that this man gave the child.

I read on my bunk while the man burped his baby and the woman looked on. I drank Cantonese sherry. It was like being in a cabin in the woods with this little family. For dinner I had the specialty of this train, “iron dish chicken pieces,” a hot iron platter of chicken, sizzling in fat. The dining car was very congenial—steam, shouting, beer fizzing,

cigarette smoke, waiters banging dishes down and snatching empty plates away.

The two men at my table were young and half-drunk. I liked these crowded dining cars rushing through the night, and the food being dished out, and people stuffing themselves.

"We sell lightbulbs and light fittings," one of the men said. "We're heading home after a week's selling."

"Where is home?" I asked.

"Harbin."

"I am going there," I said. "I want to see the ice festival and the forest."

"It's too cold to see anything," the other man said. "You will just want to stay in your room."

"That's a challenge," I said. "Anyway, how cold is it?"

"Thirty below — centigrade," he said, and he poured me some of his beer and clinked glasses.

By then I had taken for granted the friendliness of the Chinese. Their attentions were sometimes bewildering, as when they leaned over my shoulder trying to read what I was scribbling in my notebook, or pressed their damp faces against my book, fascinated by the English words. But their curiosity and good will were genuine.

"Do you travel much?" I asked.

"Yes. All over. But not outside," the first man said. "I'd like to but I can't."

"Where would you go?"

"Japan."

That surprised me. My reaction must have shown on my face, because the Chinese salesman wanted to know what I thought of his choice of country. I said, "I find the Japanese can be very irritating."

"The Americans dropped an atomic bomb on them."

"That was too bad, but they started the war by bombing Pearl Harbor, didn't they, comrade?"

"That's true!" the second man said. "The same day they captured Shanghai."

It was considered bad manners in China to say disparaging things about any foreign country, particularly to someone who was himself a foreigner. That was why the men cackled. It was naughty to run down the Japanese! It was fun! We sat there yakking until the rest of the people left the dining car. Then we stopped at Xinyang. We had gone from Hubei Province into Henan. This station was covered in black ice and slushy

snow—quite a change from the palm trees and dragonflies of Canton a few days ago.

In my compartment the man was snuggled up with his infant son, and his wife lay sleeping in the upper berth. All night the man attended to the infant. They slept together, the child snickering and snorting the way babies do. From time to time the man swung his legs over and mixed a batch of Nestlé's Lactogen, using the tea thermos of hot water and an enamel cup. He was considerate: he did not switch on the light—he used the light from the corridor. The baby's fussing increased, and then the father eased the bottle into the baby's mouth and there came a satisfied snorting. The father was very patient. The train stopped and started, was delayed at sidings waiting for a southbound express to go through, and then rattled on to the whistles of lonely freight trains. In the darkness, the man spoke softly to his child, sang to him, and when the child grew sleepy he tucked him into the berth and crept in beside him.

The muffled sounds in the morning, and the cold drafts—and there was something eerie about the daylight, too—were all produced by the falling snow. The train was battling through this snowstorm: it was beautiful—just as though the train were plowing through surf in a stormy ocean.

The loudspeaker had come on. The morning exercises were over. The comedy program with its canned laughter had ended. It was now playing music. The selections from *Carmen* were followed by "Rhine-stone Cowboy," "Green, Green Grass of Home," "Ave Maria," and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone."

I drank green tea and watched the storm abate, but as it did the weather seemed to turn colder. The ground was that pale brown of hard frozen earth, the trees stark and slender against the snow. The towns and cities lost their nightmarishness beneath the snow. But nothing else changed; nothing stopped because of the storm. There were donkeys pulling hay carts, workers crowding into factories, children tramping through fields on their way to school (wearing wool caps and carrying book bags), and lots of people cycled through the snow, down partly cleared roads.

The sky was the color of ashes. For a few minutes the sun appeared, materializing into a perfectly round but very dim orange, like an old light bulb that is about to blow. It hung there and then trembled and withdrew into the rags of cloud.

The train was still very noisy. A man was shouting; he wasn't angry, just carrying on a normal conversation. It occurred to me that this is how

many prisons must be. The voice of authority was always barking over the loudspeaker, there was always a crush of people, never any privacy. It made travel in China a strange experience for anyone used to silence and privacy.

As we approached Peking, the frozen fields and furrows were emphasized by the snow, and in the coal yards beside the line men were hacking at coal piles with picks and shovels. The snow wasn't deep — just a few inches of hard-packed stuff because of the high winds. And then in the distance, through the smoky air, I could see the cranes and derricks of the rising city.

Because it is a flat, dry, northern city, at the edge of Mongolia, Peking has beautiful skies. They are bluest in the freezing air of winter. China's old euphemism for itself was *Tianxia*, "All Beneath the Sky" — and, on a good day, what a sky! It was limpid, like an ocean of air, but seamless and unwrinkled, without a single wavelet of cloud; endless uncluttered fathoms of it that grew icier through the day and then, at the end of the winter afternoon, turned to dust.

Thinking it would be empty, I went to see the Great Wall again. Doctor Johnson told Boswell how eager he was to go to China and see the wall. Boswell was not so sure himself. How could he justify going to China when he had children at home to take care of?

"Sir," Doctor Johnson said, "by doing so [going to China] you would do what would be of importance in raising your children to eminence. There would be a lustre reflected upon them from your spirit and curiosity. They would be at all times regarded as the children of a man who had gone to view the wall of China. I am serious, sir."

The wall is an intimidating thing, less a fortification than a visual statement announcing imperiously: I am the Son of Heaven and this is the proof that I can encircle the earth. It somewhat resembles, in intention, the sort of achievement of that barmy man who gift-wrapped the Golden Gate Bridge. The wall goes steeply up and down mountainsides. To what purpose? Certainly not to repel invaders, who could never cling to those cliffs. Wasn't it another example of the Chinese love of taking possession of the land and whipping it into shape?

Anyway, the wall was not empty. It swarmed with tourists. They scampered on it and darkened it like fleas on a dead snake.

That gave me an idea. “Snake” was very close, but what it actually looked like was a dragon. The dragon is the favorite Chinese creature (“just after man in the hierarchy of living beings”), and until fairly recently—eighty or a hundred years ago—the Chinese believed dragons existed. Many people reported seeing them alive, and of course fossilized dragon skeletons had been unearthed. The dragon was a good omen and, especially, a guardian. It is one of China’s friendliest and most enduring symbols. The marauding dragon and the dragon-slayer are unknown in China. And I found a bewitching similarity between the Chinese dragon and the Great Wall of China—the way it flexed and slithered up and down the Mongolian mountains; the way its crenellations looked like the fins on a dragon’s back, and its bricks like scales; the way it looked serpentine and protective, undulating endlessly from one end of the world to the other.

On the way back from the wall I decided to stop at Peking University, where there had been student disruption. The campus was at the edge of the city, in a park-like setting, with pines and little man-made hills and a lovely lake. The lake was frozen. Skinny, panting students, with red cheeks and bobbing earflaps, slipped and skated on the ice.

I watched them with an American teacher named Roy who said, “They *do* have grievances. They want to believe what they read in the papers and hear on the news. At the moment, they get it all from the VOA and BBC. They want to trust their own government—and they don’t. They want to believe that the reforms that have begun with Deng are going to continue.”

There were three theories to explain the sudden student discontent. One: that, as Roy said, the students really did have grievances. Two: that the government was divided and the students were being used by the liberal elements to test the conservatives. Three: that the disruptions were the work of conservative elements who wanted to discredit the liberals.

I was persuaded that the students had demonstrated on their own initiative. Their grievances were genuine but muddled.

“They were really frightened,” Roy said. “They didn’t think they’d be arrested, but some were. They didn’t think the police would push them around, but the police beat some of them and abused others. They know that if it happens again they will be arrested and not released. That scares them. It means they’ll be kicked out of the university.”

“The right to demonstrate is written into the constitution,” I said.

“Sure, but it requires five days’ notice, and the students have to sub-

mit their names in advance," Roy said. "So the government will know exactly who the ringleaders are."

The students were going around and around on the ice, shrieking and skidding.

"There won't be any more demonstrations," Roy said. "They're too scared. But it was interesting. They tested their freedoms and discovered they didn't have any."

The students would not tell me their names — well, who could blame them for being suspicious? They stood on the ice of Weiming Hu and became circumspect when I changed the subject from the weather to their discontent.

One boy told me he was "a small leader." He said he was a sociology student and had been in the demonstration as well as its aftermath, when about five hundred students had returned to Tiananmen Square and held a vigil from the night of January first until the early morning of January second, when the news came of their fellow students' release from police custody.

"Our teachers support us but they are afraid to say so," he said. "Officially they are said to condemn us. But the government misreports everything. They said there were three hundred students in the first demonstration when there were actually three thousand."

I said, "Do you think this repression is an effect of socialist policies?"

"I am not allowed to answer that," he said. "But I can tell you that the trouble with a lot of Chinese students is that they don't have a will to power."

I felt he was quoting someone from his readings in sociology. And then I asked whether he thought that the students were too frightened, as Roy had said, to hold any more demonstrations.

"There will be more," he said. "Many more."

A moment later he was gone, and I talked with other students. They were jolly, frozen-faced youngsters on old, floppy skates. To ingratiate myself with them I borrowed a pair of skates, and seeing me fall down and make an ass of myself, they became very friendly. What did I think of China? they asked. How did American students compare with Chinese students? Did I like the food? Could I use chopsticks? What was my favorite city in China? They were goofy and lovable, with crooked teeth and cold white hands. When I asked them whether they had girlfriends they averted their faces and giggled. They did not seem like counter-revolutionaries.

I had repeatedly requested a High-Level Meeting — that is, a chance to talk with an important government official. In the past my request had done nothing more than make certain people suspicious. What was I doing in China? they demanded to know. They had asked me for my itinerary. Using an extremely clever if somewhat fanciful Chinese technique for ensnaring awkward visitors, they insisted that I was too important to travel alone and so stuck me with Mr. Fang. He had gone back to his desk in Peking: he did not know that I was still in China. Now I was traveling on my own.

I risked asking for a High-Level Meeting once more, hoping that they would not pounce on me and give me another nanny or babysitter. I received a message telling me to report to Comrade Bai at the well-known Ministry of Truth. I was told that I could ask anything I liked.

Before I left for the ministry I asked a Chinese friend what questions I should put to the official. He said, “No matter what you ask him you will find his answers in the *People’s Daily*.”

The taxi driver who took me to the Ministry of Truth was impressed by the address I had given him. He said, “Can you meet American officials as easily as this?”

I told him truthfully that I had never met a really high government official in Washington — that I had never gotten the urge to meet one. It was only in foreign countries that such things seemed important. But the fact was that I had spent all my time talking to people on trains, or farmers, or market traders, or kids playing in parks, or students. They were the people who really mattered; but it was absurd to spend a year going up and down in China and not talk with an official and hear the party line.

“What would you ask this official if you could?”

The driver said, “About the future.”

“What *about* the future?”

“Will I be all right? Will the reforms continue? Will we have more democracy? What about prices? And” — he started to laugh — “how can I get a new license for my taxi?”

I was met by Comrade Bai, a little fellow in a blue Mao suit. He explained that he was not the official — certainly not the high official, he added anxiously, and he breathed noisily through his clenched teeth. Then he laughed. It was the Chinese laugh of warning.

Comrade Bai led me to a ministerial reception room, and then he went to tell the high official that I had arrived.

Comrade Hu entered with a flourish, gesturing for me to return to my plump armchair. He was about fifty or so, and had Deng Xiaoping's broad, tomcat face and unblinking eyes. It was obvious that he was a party man in the new mold: he wore a gray western-style suit and speckled tie in the manner of the rising Mr. Zhao Ziyang. He seemed brisk and even a bit impatient, but he was candid, and his English was fluent.

After our opening pleasantries I asked him about the relations between China and the Soviet Union. He said there was trade between the two countries, but that there were political obstacles — Soviet aid to Vietnam, the Afghanistan business, and troops in Mongolia.

"The Soviets make a big mistake in thinking that their kind of socialism can be exported to other countries," he said. "It doesn't work."

"Can Chinese socialism be exported?" I asked.

"We do not force our ideas on other people," he said.

I then asked him a roundabout question, wondering whether the government was alarmed by the recent disturbances.

"Perhaps you are referring to the events in Peking and elsewhere caused by the students," he said, and he explained, "China is in the first stage of socialism — we are just beginning to develop. In some ways, we are underdeveloped and we are proceeding slowly and carefully. In the countryside the reforms have gone smoothly. But in cities much remains to be done."

"How long will this stage of socialism last?"

"Until we achieve our target," he said. He told me the statistics, the income figures and projections; but in an uncertain world such numbers seemed meaningless to me. It was not just inflation that he seemed to be ignoring but the rising expectations of the Chinese people.

I said, "Does it seem to you that the Chinese people are too impatient for changes to come about?"

"Some are very impatient," he said. "Especially the students. What do these students know about democracy? They are speaking in a very abstract way. They lack concrete ideas."

"Do you think the students don't understand democracy?"

"In each country there is a strict definition of democracy," he said.

"You have yours in the United States. We must have ours in China."

"So you think student demonstrations are really dangerous?"

"Some elements could get out of hand," Comrade Hu said. "They could bring disorder. If there is no control there could be chaos — everyone

doing as he likes. That could produce another Cultural Revolution.”

I did not see the logic in this. Wasn't it the other way around? If the government kept the lid on and the so-called ultra-leftists succeeded in suppressing the students, a Cultural Revolution was much more likely. He was using the Cultural Revolution as a frightener. But I got nowhere in trying to pursue this with him.

“You must read more,” he said. “You must examine our Four Guiding Principles.”

“I have read them,” I said. That particular pamphlet, in five languages (including one of China's favorites, Esperanto) was in the waiting room of most railway stations. I had plenty of opportunities to read it. “I meant to ask you about that. Guiding principle number four mentions Marxism-Leninism and Mao's thought.”

Comrade Hu's eyes were fixed upon me. The name *Mao* in China always concentrated people's attention. It was probably the single most powerful syllable in China. I said, “I was wondering which of Mao's thoughts seemed especially pertinent today.”

“One cannot summarize Mao's thought,” he said smoothly. “It is too subtle and wide ranging. Mao wrote about everything.” But when I pressed him, he said, “His essay ‘On Practice’ is one which contains the essence of his thought, and that is something we can be guided by these days.”

That essay is an argument for action, I found, when I read it later. It is about learning by doing; and “practice” is like a synonym for living, in this down-to-earth approach to running a society. It is a tract against handbooks, against bookishness of any kind — Mao loved literature but hated books. Mao seemed to sum up the essay when he wrote, “All genuine knowledge originates in direct experience.” It was a struggler's motto, and rather a good one, I thought: action was everything. It was also a good motto for a traveler.

“You must remember that China is unique,” Comrade Hu said. “There is no model for China. We have to solve our problems in our own way.”

I said, “Do you think it's a problem that China seeks the West's technology but not its ideology or influence?”

“No problem at all,” he said breezily.

“But surely there have been negative influences that have come to China with the new technology.”

“We have to educate people to make a distinction between what is good and what is bad influence.”

The word *educate* in China always seemed to me somewhat ambiguous. Education was sometimes classroom work; but just as often it was prison, the workhouse, exile, or even (as Deng had frankly emphasized) a bullet in the back of the neck.

"What do you think is especially decadent about western culture?" I asked, hoping to provoke him.

"The music of Beethoven is good, and so are many other things," Comrad Hu said. "And I don't think drugs or violence are specifically western. They are by-products. We can do without them — and prostitution, too."

Remembering what the taxi driver had said, I asked, "Will the reforms continue to increase or might they diminish?"

"They will continue as they are," Comrade Hu said. "We want to keep our open policy. We want trade with the United States to expand. We believe in reform — we want a growth rate of 7 or 8 percent."

There was an idea current among Chinese bureaucrats that the sole purpose of political reform was to produce economic growth. It had nothing to do with enlightenment, or people's minds, or the happy imagination. If liberalization did not yield material prosperity — a chicken in every pot — they would just put the screws on again. I talked around this subject but I was not sure where Comrade Hu stood on the issue, and indeed I had begun to be rather careful in my questions, for what they revealed about me.

He made me feel young, somewhat reckless and skeptical in just the same way my father had when I was sixteen. We were uneasily like father and son. There is something in the very nature of Chinese authority that makes anyone who asks questions seem childishly naive and credulous, not to say dangerous.

We talked about travel in China. He asked me about my experiences, and were they favorable? I said yes they were, and I gave him a few examples from the various trains I had ridden. Comrade Hu said, "You have been to more places in China than I have."

"I'm sure that's not true," I said.

"It's true," he said. "I haven't traveled much."

"Have you been to Urumchi?"

"No."

"What about Langxiang in Heilongjiang?" It was a small logging town in the far north that I aimed to visit.

"I have never heard of it," Comrade Hu said.

"Tibet?"

He shook his head: No. “But I have traveled abroad a great deal.”

He clawed his cuff in an obvious way and conspicuously consulted his watch. So I said that I was grateful for his valuable time, but that I had to go. He rose and took me to the door.

“You have interesting views,” I said. “I am sure people will be fascinated by them.”

“No, no, no,” he said, smiling for the first time since he had entered the room — but it was of course a smile of anxiety. “Don’t quote me.”

“Not at all?”

“No. This is a private conversation.”

“What about your mention of Mao’s essay. ‘On Practice’? I thought that was rather pertinent.”

“Nothing,” he said, and the feline look left his face. “And don’t mention my name.”

When he left me, Comrade Bai materialized among the sofas and the teacups. Comrade Bai escorted me to my taxi. “You heard what he said” — how did he know? — “Don’t use his name. And don’t mention the Ministry of Truth.”

I said, “But what the official said was interesting. Why doesn’t he want me to write it? You know I’m a writer!”

“Yes. You can write it. But just say, ‘A Chinese official.’”

What was this, the Ming Dynasty, with all the mandarins scurrying around, whispering and shifting blame and doing it with mirrors? It was not a question of being bold but simply of not wishing to be held accountable.

“Okay,” I said. “Can I quote you — that you said that?”

“Ha-ha! Better not!”

I changed the names, but as you can see I left that part in. As the Great Helmsman had said, All genuine knowledge originates in direct experience.

HISTORY

by Jorie Graham

But in the myth, at the beginning of *our* world
 matter (god x)
 wants to remain asleep.
 He (it is a *he*) resists arousal. A war ensues. A true (us) (now)
 and he must marry change (it is a *she*)
 beginning the long unwinding every step of which is *now, just now*,
 curious small house
 out of which the great girl turns.

Turn, turn, this is the medicine, it will make you well. . . .

Where we are now she's done the bright swift part, the coil has long
 since sprung.
 She's deep into the lateness now,
 undressing.
 She's standing in the open ringed with photographs of what
 took place.
 She wants to *feel* what she *sees* now.
 What she sees is him, the old King.
 Her looking over at him words cast against a wall.
 The thing we call *nothingness* the sleep that surrounds him.
 The mystery of *interval* — her push, his refusal — what we call
 love.
 Here they are now: here is the voice trying to surround the
 words.
 And here: the words trying to awaken
 what they would surround.
 Will she ever tire of his refusal?
 Will he ever awaken again and, leaning out, give birth to her
 again?

Oh ghost adieu — ye cannot raise
 thy head cool-bedded in the flowery grass —
 only it's not grass anymore, is it, but sub-
 atomic instances, etcetera — farewell!
 Would we awaken him again?
 Would we arouse him further from the drowse?
 The tree is "green". (This is the medicine)
 The dreamy outstretched arm is actually . . . (to make you well)
 See how she lifts then drops each veil —
 is this justice? is *this*?
 A voice is heard behind a door.
 Oh what will make him turn, what want can *place*
 possess?
 Out there: look up into the daylight now surrounding
 this,
 what can you see, what does she have to show
 for all the centuries of this undress? patience? desire? the thing called
 form?
 How long can it go on?
 What is there underneath that could at last awaken him — the fear of God?
 the explanation of the fear of God?
 And after that? and after that?
 and if she's naked now, then what is there to take off
 next?
 and then what will Love do?

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Jorie Graham had four poems in this issue.

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1. The names and addresses of the publisher and editor are: Publisher, The Antioch Review, Inc., Box 148, Yellow Springs, Ohio; Editor, Robert S. Fogarty, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387.

2. The owner is:
The Antioch Review, Inc., Box 148
Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other

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Filed 30 September 1991
State of Ohio, County of Greene

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